

news

significant shorts

Scotland hit by new food poisoning outbreak

Medical and environmental health experts investigating the cause of Scotland's latest outbreak of *E. coli* 0157 were due to meet today to try to pinpoint the source of the illness.

Five people in the Borders area have been confirmed as having the bacteria, although only one is in hospital. The woman, Sheena Porteous, from Hawick, who is in her early 60s, is said to be in a "satisfactory" condition in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Two of the five cases appear to be unrelated but the other three, including Mrs Porteous, had attended a Burns Supper in the village of Roberton on 7 February. The two further victims are members of the same family from the Kelso area. Borders Health Board said around 100 people who attended the gathering had now come forward to be tested for the bacteria. A spokesman added that compared to the outbreak in central Scotland, which claimed the lives of 18 pensioners and a recent outbreak in Arbroath, Tayside, which claimed two lives, the latest situation was "relatively minor".

Vicar accused of sex assaults

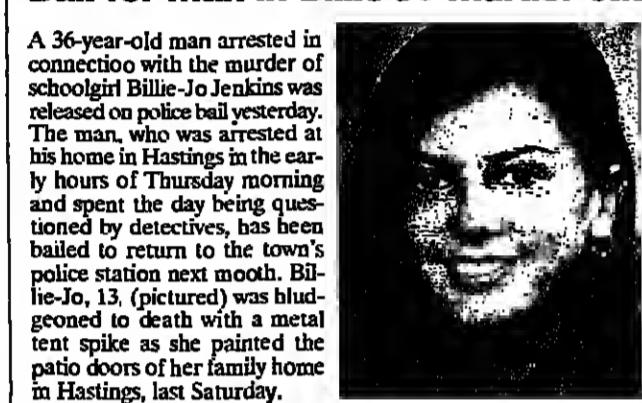
A vicar charged with indecently assaulting two young boys was remanded in police custody yesterday. David McIntosh, 51, of Fenwick Lane, Halton Lodge, Runcorn, Cheshire, appeared before magistrates in Birkenhead, Merseyside. He is accused of indecently assaulting the boys in Swindon, Wiltshire, in August 1988 and August 1989. There was no application for bail.

Crewman killed in ship blaze

Fire experts are investigating a blaze which killed a crew member and injured four others on a ship moored in docks.

Fifty firefighters tackled the fire at Newport, South Wales on board the *Inniscree*, carrying a cargo of manganese ore. Three crew were rescued from below decks and taken to hospital with the ship's captain. Firemen wearing breathing apparatus brought out a fifth man but he was dead on arrival at hospital. Two of the men are now in intensive care. A fire service spokesman said it was thought that the fire began when a chip pan caught light.

Bail for man in Billie-Jo murder case



Howarth seeks seat in Wales

Alan Howarth, the MP for Stratford-upon-Avon who crossed the floor to join Labour in 1995 is bidding to become MP for Newport East. Mr Howarth confirmed: "I will ask the constituency party if they will consider me. It is of course a decision for them. There's no question of me being imposed on the constituency." The seat was vacated last week by Roy Hughes who had a majority of 9,899 at the 1992 election. Mr Howarth can expect stiff opposition, and the expected contenders are Bryan Davies, a frontbencher whose Oldham Central and Royton seat is set to disappear under boundary changes; Mike Smith, secretary of the Fire Brigades Union in Wales; and Reg Kelly, an official of the Communication Workers Union.

Boy stabbed in school attack

A 15-year-old boy was recovering in hospital last night after being stabbed in the arm at his school.

The boy, who has not been named by police, was attacked at Heathfield County High School in Congleton, Cheshire, at 11am yesterday. Police said he was taken to hospital where his condition was described as "stable". Inspector Rick Hollinshead said a 14-year-old boy had been arrested and was to be interviewed about the incident. He added that it was the first incident of its kind in the county. Matthew Brace

BT embarrassed over adverts

British Telecom has been ordered to reconnect the telephone lines of prostitutes who advertise their numbers by placing calling cards in phone kiosks.

In an attempt to stop the proliferation of advertisements for sexual services, BT joined forces with Westminster City Council and other telephone providers last August to block incoming calls to numbers listed on the cards. But the Office of Fair Trading ruled yesterday that the agreement between the telephone providers breached competition laws because it had not been registered in advance. A BT spokesman described the ruling as a "blip" and said the company was now re-registering the move with the OFT and would start its policy of disconnection again soon.

Man dies in factory blast

One person died and another was injured yesterday in an explosion at an east Yorkshire factory. The blast in an outbuilding at the Hygena kitchen factory in Howden left two people buried in the rubble. Firefighters used thermal imaging cameras to find both people, believed to be factory employees.

Rapist jailed for 14 years

A 28-year-old machinist who subjected an 82-year-old widow to a "wicked" rape attack at her home in Weston-super-Mare was jailed for 14 years yesterday. Philip Smith, of Worle, Avon, stood impotently as the Recorder of Bristol, Judge Mark Dyer, described him as a "danger to the public", but when sentence was passed he swore at the police officer who led the inquiry and threw a cup of water over him. The sounds of scuffling could be heard as he was taken away.

people



Graham Guerin and his son Cathal, seven, after he accepted his mother's posthumous award as journalist of the year at the What The Papers Say awards in London yesterday. (Photograph: PA)

Tears and relief as Briton is released from Nigerian jail

Bruce Henderson, the Briton held for seven weeks

without charge in Nigeria, has been released and will soon be reunited with his young family.

Mr Henderson, 42, was detained in the Bakassi peninsula, a sensitive border region on the Cameroonian border, some time between 23 December and 6 January.

British consular officials were denied access to the financial controller, who has more than 10 years' experience of working in Africa.

Hopes rose last week that he would be freed – only to be dashed as the Nigerian authorities continued to keep Mr Henderson, of Chapel of Garioch, Aberdeenshire, in prison.

But yesterday the Foreign Office announced he had been released and appeared to be in good health.

"We are very pleased to report that Bruce Henderson has been released and is now at the High Commission in Lagos," a spokesman said.

"He seems to be in good health although we will be undergoing tests."

The spokesman added that British diplomats would continue to press their Nigerian counterparts on why Mr Henderson had been denied access to consular officials.

That was an improvement on the initial diplomatic exchanges on the affair. Nigerian representatives in London had denied all knowledge of Mr Henderson but then

said that if he was in fact in Bakassi he was "either a mercenary, a spy, or without sense".

The affair placed considerable strain on relations with the West African state, which was suspended from the Commonwealth in 1995 following the execution of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others.

From her home in Chapel of Garioch, near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, Mr Henderson's wife, Carol, said: "I can't believe it, it has come from nowhere, after all the disappointment of last week, it's wonderful."

"I spoke to him about five minutes ago, he says he is well, he is very confused, but is looking forward to coming home."

"He is totally unaware that he has been on the television and in all the papers."

Mr Henderson described how she had gone to the local school to tell her two younger children Craig, 10, and seven-year-old Lindsay.

"They were delighted – my little girl just said 'Yesss', but Craig was a little more emotional and tears came into his eyes," she said.

Her husband was with the British High Commission in Lagos yesterday where he is currently being "detained", she said.

Mr Henderson is unsure when his husband – who was working on a rainforest project in the Konup national park in Cameroon – will return.

■ "I am very optimistic about the school system because we are spending much more time working for our best standards. President Clinton has decided that making our school system work better is the most important agenda item so that all of you can be ready for the twenty-first century, sorry about yilos."

■ "I never thought that I could be secretary to state ... we never thought that we could be in a position to make decision for our country."

■ "Our relationship with Russia is one of the most important in the world and therefore we like to have many meetings where we can exchange ideas. I will be coming to Helsinki with the President. I have never been to Helsinki and I am looking forward to it. Tonight I ate caviar and sturgeon, with Russian bilti. A wonderful but rat-tenting dinner."

■ We can only assume that "rat-tenting" is a comment about the huge amount of calories in Russian food. Quite understandably, given her heavy diplomatic duties, Ms Albright does not want to become a rat person.

Phill Reeves

Albright spells out the benefits of new technology

Take heart, all those writers who suffer from treacherous typing fingers and all those editors who can never seem to get rid of "typos". There is someone out there who is probably worse than you: none other than the US Secretary of State, or rather, "secretary to state".

Ms Albright, who once considered a career in journalism, revealed her dependency on the spell-checker when she ventured on to the Internet during her two-day visit to Moscow.

After dining with the Russian Foreign Minister, Evgeny Primakov, she sat down at a computer-terminal for an interactive chat which linked her up with some 3,000 schools in 47 countries in a discussion about her trip and US foreign policy.

True, she was surrounded by television cameras, and was bombarded by more than 100 questions, ranging from her China policy to a demand for her views on female circumcision.



Albright: Inventing typos

Elizabeth Taylor takes a rest after tumour surgery

Doctors expect Elizabeth Taylor to fully recover after an operation that removed a 2-inch tumour from her brain.

Miss Taylor was said to be resting comfortably at a Los Angeles hospital and could be released by next Thursday, her 65th birthday.

Dr Martin Cooper said the surgery at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center appeared to be successful and without complications.

"The technical aspects of the surgery went very well," said Cooper, the clinical chief of neurosurgery at the hospital of the rich and famous where Frank Sinatra and Michael Jackson were patients recently. "The tumor is totally removed.... We expect full recovery."

The violet-eyed, Oscar-winning actress ("Butterfield 8" in 1960 and "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" in 1966) underwent four hours of surgery to remove the tumour. She was moving her arms and legs after Thursday's operation, and was expected to be in intensive care for about 24 hours.

The tumor, which will be examined further, was in the brain lining near the left parietal lobe, just behind and above the left ear. The region governs the recognition of sensations such as pain, heat and cold, and plays a role in speech functions.

Miss Taylor has had several serious hospitalisations over the years, and at least 20 major operations. She nearly died from a bout with pneumonia in 1990.

AP - Los Angeles

briefing

TRANSPORT

Watchdog attacks rail firms for misleading public

The railway passenger watchdog has attacked train companies over "blatant fiddling on punctuality".

In a talk to rail professionals, David Bertram, the chairman of the Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee, said that companies were inserting an extra 10 minutes before the final stop in a train's journey in order to avoid compensating customers for late arrivals.

He told the conference on "The New Railway": "To measure the punctuality of a train from Edinburgh by its arrival time in Penzance, when it may have been late en route and missed lots of connections, is wrong." A spokesman for the committee also pointed out that it was difficult to see why the journey from Peterborough to the capital took up to 10 minutes longer than services running in the other direction.

Payments to travellers are made by train companies under the Passenger Charter, which was introduced in 1992.

Companies denied they were deliberately misleading passengers. A spokesman for the Association of Train Operating Companies, which represents all 25 passenger services, said: "It is necessary to have some sort of contingency plans for rail journeys especially into London which is frequently congested." Randeep Ramesh

FOOD

Faster route to healthy diet

An American company is aiming to cash in on the growth in healthier eating and the beef scare when it launches 100 fast-food outlets in Britain.

Calvin's Barbecue claims to be the more authentic taste of the United States and is investing around £25m in the restaurants which will serve chicken, fish and pork as opposed to the more standard fare of beef. The first one will open opposite a McDonald's site in Birmingham next month to be followed by 18 more in the West Midlands.

The company, which is backed by a group of New York restaurateurs, believes there is a lack of competition in the Midlands and plans to open the remaining 80 outlets in the area over the next three years. It expects to create about 500 jobs.

Calvin Johnson, managing director, said: "There is a market niche for something in the same price range as McDonald's, providing fresh food which you can watch coming off a barbecue grill."

CRIME

Youngsters get taste of prison life

A town's would-be criminals are being persuaded to go straight by being confronted by the grim facts of prison life, it was disclosed yesterday.

Cleveland Police said there had been a 50 per cent drop in re-offending rates in Stockton after the launch of a scheme to tell young offenders what it was really like in jail.

Special sessions are organised in which a prison officer tells the youngsters, who have all clocked up their second caution, all about shooting out and bullying. They also learn about restraints and equipment that can be used on inmates.

Parents or guardians accompanying them have been equally shocked by the "warts and all" presentations. One boy's father said: "There's no excuse for him getting into trouble again now he knows what to expect if he does."

Inspector Ian Birch, who helps run the scheme, said: "One unforeseen bonus was that other members of the family, including brothers, sisters and friends of the person to be cautioned also attend on a voluntary basis."

"Consequently peer pressure to commit crimes may be reduced as more people than anticipated now know the consequences of committing crime".

HOUSING

Extra £7.9m for homeless

A scheme designed to help homeless people find permanent accommodation received a welcome boost yesterday after the Government made an extra £7.9m available.

The housing minister, James Cleophas, said the extra finances should encourage homelessness organisations to come forward, and apply for grants to assist with the running costs of their projects.

He said: "For 1997/98 the Government has made available £7.9m which will help single people in housing need."

"In addition to continuing to fund all eligible existing projects, this means we shall be inviting bids from voluntary organisations to set up new schemes."

"The grant programme has been particularly successful in helping homeless people find and keep accommodation and continues to represent good value for money."

The types of projects that have previously benefited from these grants include the national Homelessness Advice Service and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Applications for aid should be made to Homelessness and Housing Management Policy Division, Zone 2/A2, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU. David Garfinkel

TOURISM

Americans given rough guide

Writers from all over the world gathered in London yesterday to mark the International Day of the Tourist Guide.

Travel experts took a tour through London to help them compile routes for future influxes of tourists to Britain.

However, there is a problem lurking on the Internet for the purveyors of such respected publications. The Guide for Americans Visiting Britain originated at Cornell University but has attracted the attention of tourists from all parts of the globe. It apparently purports to be a serious entrant into the market but it may prove disastrous if its users take too much of its advice.

Particular fun to be had with the beef crisis. The guide offers these words on the difficulties of ordering in a restaurant: "The best cuts of meat, like the best bottles of gin, bear her majesty's seal, called the British Stamp of Excellence. Tell the waiter you want BSE beef and don't settle for anything less."

It also says that black cabs are sponsored by the state and cost only £2 no matter how far you travel. Buses are even cheaper with three pence being good for any journey to your stated destination.



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It's a rainier than average February; so why are the water companies talking again about crisis?

Scepticism as utility chiefs blame climate for shortages. **Nicholas Schoon** reports

Water companies claimed yesterday that England will face a crisis of permanent drought unless they are allowed to boost resources and build new reservoirs and pipelines.

The Water Companies' Association claimed climate change and steadily rising demand from their customers meant that cutting mains leakage and persuading people to waste less water could not prevent a looming crisis and fundamental changes in lifestyles. Daily cut-offs for several hours would become common, and green lawns and car washing would be consigned to history.

But there was scepticism about the companies' claims. If the solutions they want are adopted, then customers' bills will rise to pay for the expensive new reservoirs. It will also leave companies selling more and more water, raising their turnover and profits.

The Environment Agency, the Government body which regulates rivers and water resources, said there was no case for starting work on major new water supplies immediately.

Ofwat, the industry's economic regulator, agreed saying companies first had to do more work on restraining rising demand from their customers – and that included more metering.

"Water conservation delivers



Cracks in the argument: The effects of drought on a river bed in Kent last summer. Environmentalists say climate alone is not always to blame

Photograph: Brian Harris

results more quickly, more economically and without the environmental risks – of new water transfers and reservoirs," said Dr Geoff Mance, the agency's water management chief. Friends of the Earth called on the companies to invest in conservation measures.

Ray Tennant, chairman of the association which represents 17 of the smaller water companies in England and Wales, said without new supplies "cu-

tomers could have to accept hosepipe and sprinkler restrictions as normal practice every summer. We would have to restrict the number of new houses built each year – customers may have to go without water for periods of the day. This may be common practice in less developed countries, but we are supposed to be one of the most advanced nations in the world".

Meteorological Office figures show there has been a run of dry years since 1989. But a spokesman said: "We can't see any change in the climate. There are a little hiccups and this could well be one of them. It's far too early to say that the climate has become drier."

While last month had exceptionally low rainfall, this month is going to have above average. By yesterday the average quantity of rain for the entire month had already fallen – and there is still a week of February left. This winter's overall rainfall looks like being pretty close to the average for the last 30 years.

Mr Tennant, managing di-

rector of South East Water and Mid Southern Water, said yesterday that he was convinced England's climate had become drier and the industry had to plan on the basis that this would

continue or worsen. He said a growing number of households and increasing affluence meant more and more demand for water. People were also much less willing to tolerate shortages

and restrictions under a privatised industry.

The water companies all planned to cut mains leakage and encourage their customers to use water less wastefully,

which meant water meters for some. But those policies alone could not cope with the growing gap between limited supplies and rising demand.

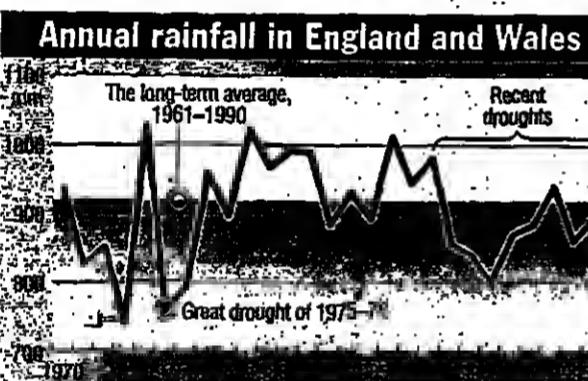
In some areas, such as East

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and West Sussex, plans to build thousands of new homes should be dropped unless there were also plans for new water supplies. "There are no major rivers and all the water resources are already fully exploited," Mr Tennant said. One major new reservoir was needed to serve Kent, Surrey and East and West Sussex, and another to serve East Anglia.

The Water Services Association, which represents nine of the big ten water companies, said it supported the time taken by the smaller companies but dissociated itself from talk of a looming crisis.

All the companies are trying to influence the public politicians and the water regulators in the run up to the next water bill-setting exercise in 1999. The companies have to draw up their investment plans for Ofwat, the industry's price-setting watchdog, covering the next decade by the end of 1998. Several want to include new resources in those plans and to be allowed to raise their customers' bills to pay for them.



Haemophiliac boy refused treatment

Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

A nine-year-old boy suffering from haemophilia is taking High Court action against his health authority after it refused to fund treatment which is generally preferred by doctors.

In what is believed to be the first case of its kind, the boy is taking action against Bury and Rochdale Health Authority after it decided that he would no longer be treated with a pure, artificial form of the clotting agent Factor VIII, but a cheaper version which carries a higher risk of viral infection.

Doctors are largely unanimous in their view that recombinant Factor VIII is preferable to plasma-derived Factor VIII, which is made from treated human blood, for all haemophiliacs but especially for children.

Rebecca Fitzpatrick, the boy's solicitor, said the health authority's decision was "irrational, unfair and perhaps illegal". He had been treated with recombinant since October but he and other children were informed in January that they would now be treated with plasma-derived Factor VIII.

Doctors said they were applying for leave to seek a judicial review with a

hearing next week. Meanwhile, they hope for an intermediate injunction which will force the health authority to continue to provide the treatment.

"They are not giving him the best treatment available. It is a blanket-policy decision covering potentially hundreds of people and they have not considered individual cases," she said.

Plasma-derived Factor VIII fell under the spotlight when in the early Eighties when 1,200 haemophiliacs were infected with HIV from contaminated Factor VIII, and around 3,000 haemophiliacs have been infected with Hepatitis C to date.

Screening processes have since been tightened but two viruses, Hepatitis A and parvo-virus, are resistant to all sterilisation techniques, and there is also the danger posed by viruses yet to be identified.

The UK's use of recombinant is between 4-10 per cent of all Factor VIII given, compared with 50 per cent in Germany. But it costs half as much again as the plasma-derived product, and if a health authority refuses to pay for it, then a doctor has little choice but to prescribe the less safe product.

Tony Wilson, chief executive of the Haemophilia Society said yesterday: "[We believe]

that recombinant Factor VIII should be available for the treatment of children with Haemophilia A [and we] deplore the fact that parents should be forced to take legal action to try to obtain treatment for their children.

"The Society believes that the current situation, with children in some parts of the country being able to receive recombinant Factor VIII and others not, is grossly inequitable..."

But Dr Kevin Snee, director of public health for the authority, said that the main benefit of transferring patients to recombinant Factor VIII is "recombinant Factor VIII reduces around the removal of a hypothetical risk" and would cost an additional £200,000 per year in Bury and Rochdale. As the current financial situation stands, Dr Snee stated that the money could be better spent on other treatments of greater benefit.

"Current blood products are safe and therefore recombinant factor VIII is difficult to justify when compared to other health service priorities," he said. "However as the situation becomes clearer with regard to the uncertainties over antibody production with recombinant factor VIII our position will be reviewed."

Kidnap fear for missing girls

The distraught parents of two French girls missing in London appealed yesterday for help in finding them. They said that they feared teenagers Laetitia Ranson and Anjelique Wozniak may have been kidnapped after becoming separated from their friends during a visit to the capital on Wednesday.

A team of 15 detectives, backed by uniformed officers carrying photographs of the girls, is combing the West End in the hope of finding them.

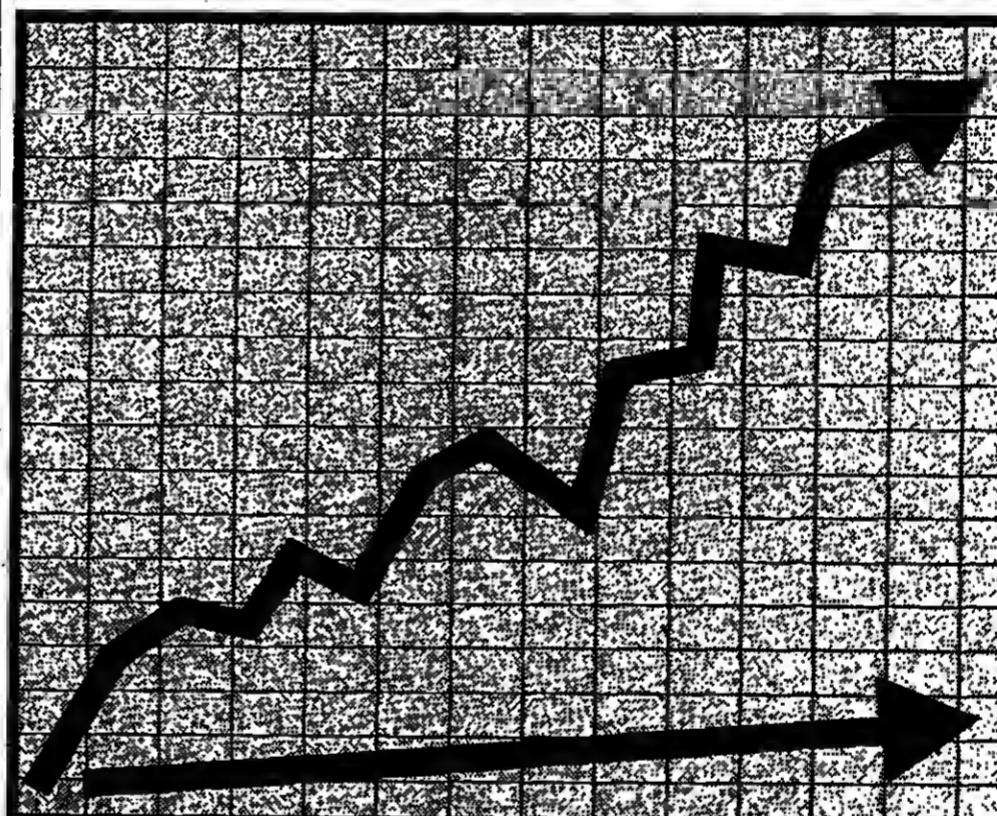
Anjelique's father, Noel Wozniak, 45, said it was out of character for the girls to go off on their own. They were unused to big cities and had rarely been away from their home vil-

lage of Grenay, near Lille. Jacky Ranson, 49, father of 16-year-old Laetitia, told a news conference at Scotland Yard: "We would like anyone to get in touch with the police and we appeal to our daughters, if they are safe, to go to any policeman or place of safety. We just want to know they are all right."

Mr Wozniak added: "We think maybe they have been kidnapped. Something bad must have happened to them."

The girls were last seen at 4pm on Wednesday at Selfridges in Oxford Street. Detectives are studying closed circuit television videos from the store and nearby premises in the hope of spotting them.

Anyone with information is asked to telephone police on 0181 246 0776.



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politics

Major plays long game for economy to rescue the Tories' poll support

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

A clear hint that John Major intends to play it long to give economic recovery a chance to rescue Conservative support was given yesterday by the Prime Minister in an election-closing tour in the North East.

Talking up the recovery, Mr Major said it was becoming increasingly understood by people that Britain was outperforming other European countries, including France and Germany, and the evidence of the up-turn was in the high street.

"How soon that translates itself into votes we will have to wait and see," Mr Major said. "I think the British people will see the prospects opening up. I don't think they will want to throw them away."

He shrugged off suggestions

that the Government would be unable to close the gap between the recovery and its low showing in the opinion polls. "I have always thought you would see the full recovery of support when people actually have an election date, and people see a clear-cut decision before them."

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Mr Major last night told a business awards dinner on Teesside that the recovery was being felt across the country. "We really can hope that we are waving goodbye to the North-South divide," he added.

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The Prime Minister will also announce a major development of education policy, aimed at putting Labour on the defensive over grammar schools and nursery vouchers. It could herald the introduction of vouchers for secondary education.

His prime aim yesterday appeared to be to rally support among the faithful, as the guest at a private party luncheon organised by the millionaire financier, Sir John Hall, who was knighted by Margaret Thatcher, at his private estate in North Cleveland. Sir John, the charismatic chairman of Newcastle United Football Club, is also an important backer of the Conservative

Party. But party officials insisted that the meeting for 200 invited voluntary workers was not a fund-raising event.

The Prime Minister rejected as "the politics of abuse rather than reality", the accusation by Tony Blair that Mr Major was the prisoner of the Tory right on the single European currency.

"Sometimes you have to stand out against other people in the European Union in the British interest," Mr Major said. And he recalled that Mrs Thatcher was isolated when she won Britain's rebate - further evidence that her ghosts have not been laid.

There has been speculation that Mr Major could announce the date for the election today and government departments have been asked to clear the decks of legislation by the end

of March. For example, the National Health Service Primary Care Bill - agreement having been reached with the British Medical Association - is being accelerated for royal assent by the end of next month.

But Mr Major is likely to keep Mr Blair guessing a little longer although it appears clear he has May in his sights. The Prime Minister toured a re-training centre on Teesside but close friends say he will not need re-training if he loses his job in May - he is content to go back to the City in the knowledge that he could not be blamed for defeat.

And he had advice for anyone wanting his job in his radio interview. He said being prime minister meant you had to be able to go without sleep, another habit belonging to Baroness Thatcher, as she is now.

Ready to go: John and Norma Major read breakfast menus on a train at King's Cross station, London, yesterday before travelling to the North East

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

Michael Heseltine and Tony Blair yesterday united in warning against the dangers of Britain pulling out of the European Union.

The deputy Prime Minister told a BBC Radio 5 phone-in: "I know people find this difficult to believe, but I know we are gaining from the European partnership, and I know that to be outside it would be a disaster. You say rightly the economy is doing very well but I tell you, if we were in fact to prejudice Britain's position in Europe, you would find a very difficult situation."

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whether that will hold."

Mr Heseltine's acknowledgement of the risks involved in withdrawal suggests a growing fear on the Tory left that the Euro-sceptics are setting the pace of policy. But as with Lord Howe's warning on Thursday - that the former deputy Prime Minister could not support a party that was "hostile" to the principle of a single currency - Mr Heseltine appeared to be warning that he is not going to surrender without a bitter fight.

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international

Ghosts of battles past return to torment the Russian bear

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

At the start of Sergey Eisenstein's epic 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky*, one of the prince's subjects asks why he doesn't do something to shake off the yoke of the Mongol overlords, to whom the Russian princes, overrun in 1238, paid tribute. "We will deal with them in time", he says. "But first, we have a greater enemy to defeat. The *Nemtsy* [Germans]."

Prince Alexander meant invaders from the west – the Swedes, whom he defeated in 1240, and the Teutonic knights, against whom he fought the great battle on the ice of the river Neva – hence his title – in 1242. Eisenstein's film was made as a warning and as preparation for impending war against Germany. But that scene provided a neat summary of a very Russian preoccupation: the fear of encirclement, and of war against two enemies – or three, or four – at once.

That recurring fear has resurfaced as the Russian bear puts up a steel-shod paw against

Nato enlargement. When so encircled, Russia always rates the West as its most formidable opponent.

In October, the former national security adviser, Alexander Lebed, met General Klaus Naumann, the Chairman of Nato's Military Committee, and told him Russia had security concerns in three areas. The first was the West, by which he meant Nato, and potential Nato members – especially Poland – and Ukraine, which has no intention of joining Nato. The second was the south-west – the Middle East, and the third was the south – Iran and Afghanistan. He did not mention China specifically, but the East has been a frequent concern and may become one again. And bearing in mind that any strategic attack by the United States, with bombers or missiles, could come over the North Pole, Russia feels surrounded.

The country's darkest hours were in the Middle Ages and in 1918-1920. In the 13th century the Russian principalities were attacked by Danes, Swedes, Poles, Germans and Hungarians



said a Russian colonel. "Look where that got us."

At its greatest extent, the Russian or Soviet Empire occupied about a sixth of the earth's land surface. Until 1867, the Russian empire traversed three continents and went more than half way round the world – Alaska, sold to the US for a song, was Russian. Russia itself

still covers one eighth of the land surface of the world. It also has about 12,000 nuclear warheads.

Why should such a country feel encircled? Since the Soviet break-up, Russian intellectuals have resurrected Sir Halford Mackinder's idea of the "Heartland", and the historian's famous proposition that control

of eastern Europe was crucial to control of the heartland. Furthermore, "those who rule the Heartland dominate the World Island [Eurasia]; those who rule the World Island dominate the world". But that very central position makes Russia vulnerable to isolation by oceanic powers who want to seize the rim of the world island.

Russia's traditional response to encirclement has been to divide potential enemies, and to push them further away. The main force behind the development of the Soviet navy from the 1960s seems to have been that having pushed the "enemy" as far away as it could on land, the Soviets then had to push it further still. As a large part of

the "threat" came from US aircraft carriers and US, British and French ballistic-missile firing submarines, they wanted to push that further away, too.

Madeleine Albright, the new US secretary of state, is trying to reassure the Russians that Nato enlargement is not a threat. Given the history of the past 750 years, she has a hard

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Albright thaws out the Moscow chill

Phil Reeves
Moscow

The US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, flew out of Moscow last night after striking up a surprisingly amicable relationship with the Russians without making much progress in overcoming their fierce objections to the expansion of Nato.

As she left for the Asian leg of her high-speed nine-capital tour, Russia continued to hold out for a legally-binding charter governing its relationship with an enlarged Alliance, including a promise that no nuclear weapons will be stationed on the soil of new members.

Although Mrs Albright spoke of making "important progress" in her crucial first meeting as US Secretary of State with the Russian Foreign Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, it was clear that no agreement had been reached on a number of key is-

sues during her 24-hour trip.

Although Mr Primakov complimented the talks as "fruitful", he said that Russia was "still negatively disposed" to Nato's growth, although it was "doing everything we can conceivably think of in order to minimise the negative consequences."

However, the arrival of the Albright express in Moscow produced little of the fury that has recently emanated out of Moscow with every mention of Nato's plans to move towards Russia's borders, an issue that many believe threatens satellitely in Russia. Significantly, a generally amicable relationship appears to have grown up between Ms Albright and Mr Primakov – in contrast to the chill that hung over his dealings with Warren Christopher, her predecessor.

Although Nato has said it will go ahead with its expansion plans without an agreement with Russia, it would prefer to

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Obituaries / gazette

The Rev Michael Hollings

"Bless This Mess!" The sign, in huge black Gothic, swung on an Anglepoise over the desk.

As desks go, this was less messy than most: a mass of sprawling files, running correspondence, refugee stationery, a surface huy with pens in progress. Next to it, however, on the floor, by the chair with the bursting stuffing, by the box of very miscellaneous bottles, lay a heap of books collapsed like the victims of some unimaginable natural disaster, a sea of pamphlets and paper so deep that from month to month their surface hardly rustled. Clothes hung on the door. A sleeping bag lay on a sofa which had long seen better days. This was the room in which Father Michael Hollings, Roman Catholic parish priest of St Mary of the Angels, Bayswater, lived and worked and slept and prayed.

His Notting Hill neighbour Father Francis Wahle described Hollings as "a near saint". His most vocal parishioner, the journalist Paul Johnson, called him "the best parish priest I have ever come across". Hollings was the "open house" priest who lived a famously ascetic life and turned no one away, the priest of the Notting Hill Carnival whose physical presence could still a riot, the man who first brought Mother Teresa's nuns to England.

In 1975, when Cardinal Heenan died, Hollings was ahead of Basil Hume in the betting to succeed as Archbishop of Westminster. Instead, he wrote a torrent of books, sat on committees on all subjects from the press to race relations, and devoted himself with a passionate concentration to the particular needs of his parish.

Hollings's passion could not be suppressed. He quoted St Ignatius - "I think the greatest battle in life is against self", and his struggle to impose order on his private chaos was an obvious thread in his development - obvious, impressive and what made him immediately sympathetic and accessible. On the one hand, he had extraordinary gifts as a listener, a close focus and an ability to deliver accurate advice - always what to do next; on the other, a brisk impatience which was as bracing as it could be alarming. "Press on," he would say. "Press on."

Michael Hollings was born in 1921, in Cumberley, the son of Lt-Cdr Richard Hollings, an Anglican whose family built churches in Yorkshire and wouldn't allow a Catholic in the house (his mother, Nina Hollings, was the eccentric sister of the formidable Dame Ethel Smyth), and Molly, nee Hamilton-Dalrymple, a Catholic and a Scot descended, interestingly, from a Cardinal, Thomas Weld, whose father gave Storyhouse to the Society of Jesus.

Michael's father died of tuberculosis when he was six, leaving his mother to bring up three children on her own. He was educated by the Jesuits at Beaumont College (which he hated) and at 17, as war broke out, talked himself into Oxford, where he spent two years at the then St Catherine's Society, before attending Sandhurst and being commissioned in the Coldstream Guards. He spent four years in North Africa and Italy, and was awarded the Military Cross in 1943, for "devotion to duty" during a night attack on Long Stop Hill, Tunis, on 22/23 December 1942. He was 20.

The creation records: During the whole engagement, as on all previous occasions, this officer showed outstanding powers of leadership. Towards the end of the fight he was shot through the throat but made no effort to obtain medical treatment and continued to carry out his duties until, as part of the plan of action, he was disengaged his Platoon from the enemy. Then he made his way for some miles, during which time he kept insisting that his injury was of no consequence. When later he reported to the Regimental Aid Post and was evacuated, it was found that his wound was of the gravest nature and must have caused him great pain for many hours. A major operation was at once necessary to save his life.

In 1945 he was posted to Palestine, and it was here, after five years of unbelief, that Major Hollings MC, on guard duty in the Holy Land, decided he wanted to be a priest. He went to see his chaplain, who remonstrated, "But you don't even go to Mass!" Hollings said that wasn't the point. He wanted to help people.

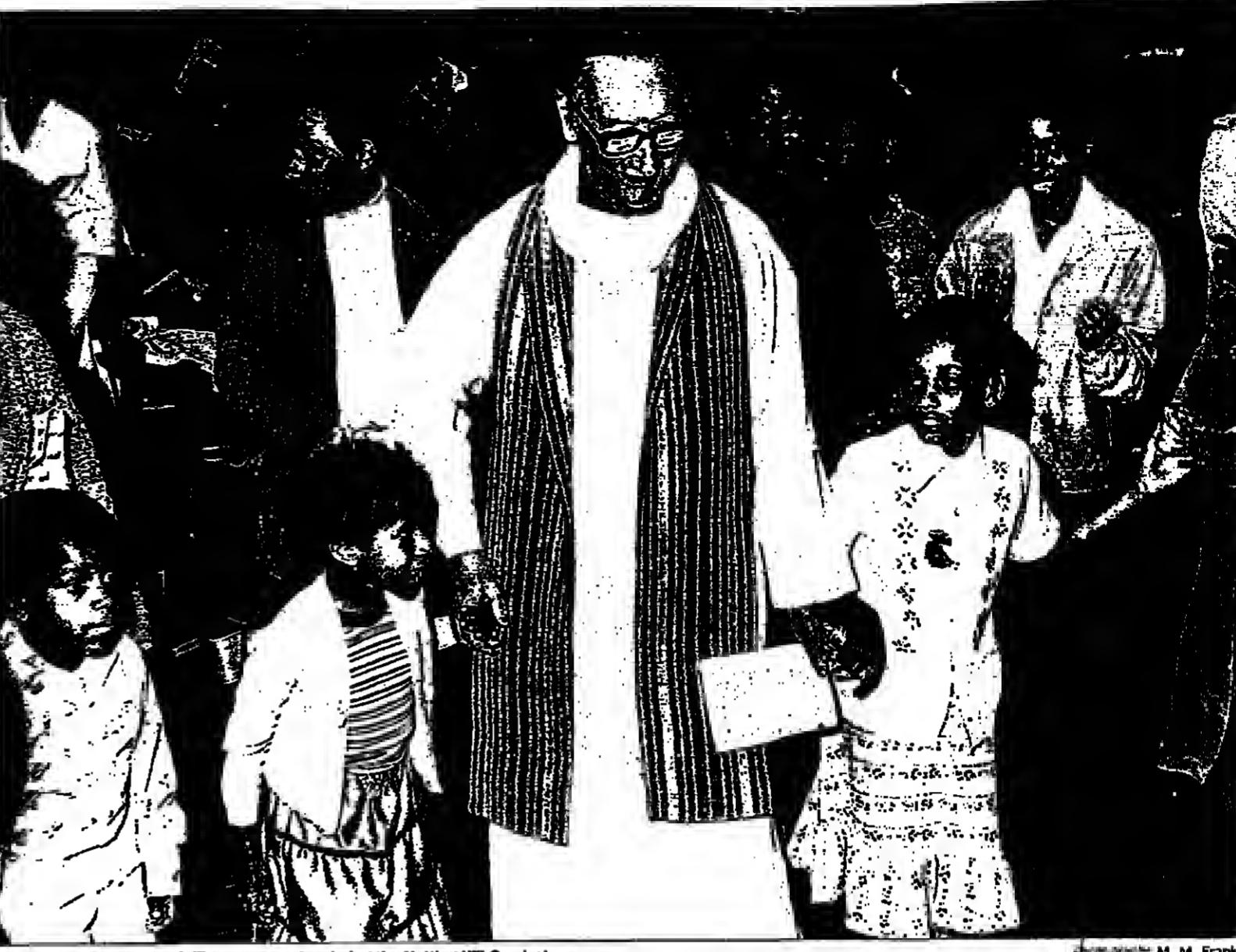
Helping people remained consistently his mission. Privately, he established for himself, in the four years he spent training at the Beda College in

Rome, 1946-50, "a life which put most of the weight on prayer and penance", as he affirms in his book *Living Priesthood* (1977). "I made a bedtime for myself, introduced sleeping on the floor and getting up to pray in the middle of the night." He took to the regime of the *magnum silentium*, he felt the lure of the monastery; he did his pre-ordination retreat with the Trappists at Tre Fontane, outside Rome. Prayer became the pivot, the still centre of his life, and a subject to which he returned repeatedly in his writing and broadcasting. Everyone should pray, he said; pray as you walk. Priests themselves should be "pools of prayer - serene and available".

At Rome he laid the foundations of a deep and enduring friendship with his first cousin Jock Dalrymple, his junior by seven years, later University Chaplain at St Andrews and himself a considerable writer. In time they were to take the idea of availability a stage further: they would each practise Hollings in Southall, west London, and then in Bayswater. Dalrymple in Resterig, Edinburgh, was radical. A priest, said Hollings, should be Christ-like: there should be no distance between him and his people. His house should be open to all comers, he should share his food, his space, his all.

This was not then usual policy among Catholic clergy in Britain: nor popular, nor safe, nor, indeed, is it now. Michael Hollings welcomed "street women" (as he called prostitutes) and "men of the road" as he would welcome his friend the Duke of Norfolk. He was no respecter of persons; or, to put it another way, he was an extremely unusual respecter of persons.

His first posting as a priest was in Soho. He spent four years as a chaplain at Westminster Cathedral (a penance: he couldn't hear the ceremonial) and a year as assistant chaplain at London University, when in reality he was unpaid Religious Adviser to West, before his first substantial appointment, as Roman Catholic Chaplain to Oxford University. Here he knocked down the Nissen hut he had inherited and engaged



The 'open house' priest: Hollings at a service during the Notting Hill Carnival

PHOTOGRAPH: M. M. Franks

Ahrends, Burton & Koralek to design the versatile building which is the Catholic Chaplaincy today. Hollings spent 11 years at Oxford, enjoying its collegiate hubbub, before asking to be moved. He was offered St Anselm's, Southall.

Both Southall, where he spent eight years, and Bayswater, where he spent nearly 19, were complicated, multi-racial parishes. It was in the context of the predominantly Asian community of Southall that Hollings persuaded Mother Teresa to found a house there for her Missionaries of Charity, only the second house in Europe after that in Rome, and he and she remained close for the rest of his days. For Notting Hill's West Indian dominated annual carnival, St Mary of the Angels had its own float and Hollings assumed the role of peacemaker, notably as a negotiator with the police, in the carnival's troubled 1980s.

Michael Hollings was an inspiration to generations of priests and would-be priests as much as to the vagabonds, grandees and straightforward parishioners who made free with his presbytery. He made enemies; but he had a legion of friends across the world - his larger parish - to whom he was counsellor, touchstone, guide.

His various contradictions were his strength. He was tall, large-nosed, somewhat patrician in voice and manner; but quite without the caricature snobberies of the metropolitan Catholic priest. He had streaks of real vanity; but was possessed of an astonishing humility. His insistence on penitentially early rising could make him dangerously bad-tempered; but he had a sweetness and humour, a boyish grin, which disarmed. He was shy and abhorred small talk; but one-to-one was ever curious, even eloquent. His published writings are fast and furious, de-

liberately wordy rather than polite or polished; his homilies, on the other hand, were rich, pertinent and compelling.

One London priest discerns vividly two sides to Hollings: a holiness, the radical holiness of the 19th-century Curé d'Ars, the model of a diocesan priest leading a life of severe obedience; and an impetuosity with scant respect for church structures and orders, of an original, of a prophet. Hollings looked to intercommunion, ordination of women, rethinking of the Church's position on homosexuals, on remarriage, on clerical celibacy. He endured these hideous travails with the same stoicism that he had shown 54 years earlier at Long Shot Hill: but now with a new serenity. The battle with self was nearly over.

"Life," Michael Hollings wrote in *Living Priesthood*, "has been like a tightrope walk, a balancing between that of obedience which authority accepted and an obedience which seems almost like disobedience... an abandonment of God." Hollings, in the manner of the early Christians, abandoned himself to God.

James Fergusson

Michael Richard Hollings, priest: born Cumberley, Surrey, 30 December 1921; MC 1943; ordained priest 1946; Assistant Priest, St Patrick's, John Square 1950-54; Chaplain, Westminster Cathedral 1954-58; Assistant Chaplain, London University 1958-59; Religious Adviser, All Hallows 1959-60; Rutherford 1959-60; Thames Television 1968; Chaplain to Roman Catholics at Oxford University 1969-70; Parish Priest, St Anselm's, Southall 1970-76; St Mary of the Angels, Bayswater 1976-97; Dean of North Kensington 1980-97; MBE 1993; books include *Hey, You!* 1955; *The One Who Listens* (with Eita Gallick) 1971; *Day by Day* 1972; *Living Priesthood* 1977; *Hearts Not Garners* 1982; *Christ Died at Notting Hill* 1985; died London 21 February 1997.

Christopher Driver was perhaps Britain's most perceptive writer about matters of food and drink in the last three decades, and editor of *The Good Food Guide* from 1970 to 1982. He described himself as one who owed "most of his tastes in food, drink, art and apparel to the sedate professional class in which he was brought up", but he never fell victim to self-delusion and was more open to prospects of novelty and adventure than most of us.

He was born in 1932, the son of a doctor living in south India. His father eventually retired into the book trade, running a shop in the Dorset town of Shaftesbury which Christopher Driver continued to manage until its sale a couple of years ago. He was educated at the Dragon School, Oxford, at Rugby, where he was head boy, and at Christ Church, Oxford, where he read Greats. Classics, particularly Latin, were the ever-present bedrock (and occasional volcanic peak) of his complicated, but always logical,

prose style. It now seems inevitable that one classical scholar, Raymond Postgate, should have ensured his succession at *The Good Food Guide* by another.

A conscientious objector, Driver undertook his National Service after Oxford in the Friends Ambulance Unit, an organisation that embraced both religious and intellectual non-conformity in a peculiarly British, albeit international, style. A perfect niche, in fact, for Driver, who later acknowledged his role in his gastronomic education. Another pillar of British taste at that time, George Perry-Smith, of the Hole in the Wall restaurant in Bath (perhaps *The Good Food Guide's* favourite, if ever it could have been less than impartial), was also transmuted from Cambridge graduate to cook by the solvent of the FAU.

Driver joined the *Liverpool Daily Post* in 1958 to learn the craft of journalism, moving to the *Manchester Guardian* in



Driver: galvanic effect

1960, where he remained, with intermissions, until his death. From 1964 to 1968 he was features editor, then, after his stint with *The Good Food Guide*, he returned to edit the first weekly page devoted to food and drink in any national newspaper, from 1984. Latterly, he shared responsibility for obituaries. Driver's cast of mind - clever, knowledgeable, sardon-

ic and not a little dismissive of the sacred cows of the establishment - seemed perfectly attuned to that of the *Guardian*.

He had been informally involved in the horticultural democracy of *The Good Food Guide* since it was sold in 1963 to the Consumers' Association by its founder Raymond Postgate, who continued as its editor. Begun by Postgate in response to some articles he had written in 1949 about the awfulness of British catering, it was the harbinger of the whole process of British consumerism: the middle classes telling each other how to master the confidence tricksters of commerce and reporting their successes on thousands of little forms that were converted into a publishable annual.

Driver's appointment as successor to Postgate in 1970 was in fact unexpected, another having been groomed for the editor's chair, but he soon set about revitalising the guide, profiting from the acute guidance and information provided

by its chief inspector, Aileen Hall. The British catering trade has never liked criticism. In 1970, except for the *GFG*, there was none; merely lavish reports of feasted by impecunious journalists anxious to fill space, or very poor guides that took the trade at its own valuation. Even Postgate's guide tended to the gentle. Driver had none of it. Disregarding that aspect of restoration and hotel-keeping that has more to do with theatre and entertainment than good cooking, and is more concerned with profit and charges than value, he did away with scores of hitherto unheeded entries; excoriated many which remained in intelligent prose which exposed the soft belly of their cupidity and the vain pretensions of their customers; and included with gusto and near-apostolic zeal Indian, Chinese and other ethnic restaurants which had hitherto been thought beneath a linen-and-crystal gourmand's notice.

The effect was galvanic. In 1978, the fancy end of the business combined (for once) to launch letters to the *Times*, meetings with the Consumers' Association, and constant abuse from its lackeys in the trade press. With hindsight, Driver was right, and they were very wrong. Without his bars, and they could be difficult to extract from a bleeding, bloated limb, the customer would have been less well served than he was.

He was less than happy with the populist turn that both the Consumers' Association and the guide were to adopt after his departure (which to the outsider seemed prompted by a certain decline in sales, mostly due to the Thatcher-Hovey stomp), but he was able to state his view of things with impressive clarity in *The British at Table* 1940-1980 (1983), a history of our food habits that seems almost impossible to fault for its careful analysis and exquisite phrasing.

His love of food - and his en-

thusiasm at the sight of good food and wine was quite infectious - was balanced by a strong sense of faith: nonconformist, independent. This had to be evident for his disliking the gratuitous display that seemed inextricable from *haute cuisine*. He was a board member of Christian Aid (1972-84). He wrote his first book in 1962, *A Future for Free Churches*; and revisited his non-violent past in *The Disarmers* (1964), about CND. In 1968 he took leave of absence to study universities in *The Exploding University*. Latterly, he wrote more about music (*Musica for Love*, 1994) which impassioned him (two of his three daughters are professional musicians) and social history (*Pepys at Table*, with Michael Berriedale-Johnson, 1984). His last book, published only the month before he died, was *John Evelyn, Cook*, which is his transcription of Evelyn the diarist's own recipe book, never before printed. He ended with a flurry of activity: a new volume

of poems, *Stokes*, and an orchestration of Schubert. Recent years had been dogged by a stroke that he suffered while walking in the Lake District in 1987, and the subsequent discovery of a brain tumour in 1993. This did not impair his facilities, though making his prose more convoluted than ever it had been. He continued to enjoy any sorts of mordant wit, fine wine, friendship and food, while with the devoted care of his wife Margaret, who survives him, he managed concerts at Wigmore Hall until the last.

Ton Jaine

Christopher Prout Driver, writer and broadcaster: born December 1932; Reporter, Guardian 1960-64; Features Editor 1964-68; Food and Drink Editor 1984-88; Personal Page Co-Editor 1988-94; consultant 1994-97; Editor, The Good Food Guide 1990-92; married 1958 Margaret (deceased) (three daughters); died London 18 February 1997.

Thrills, spills, lots of fun - but ultimately not real

faith & reason

Liberals and charismatics are both blaming one another for the rush from the Anglican pews. Is style in worship just a question of taste? The Rev Dr Martyn Percy suggests there may be something more profound at stake.

mands for an intimate immediacy with the divine.

Advocates of contemporary Christian worship would naturally wish to claim that their religion is not of the same spirit. Yet songs used in worship among some charismatics often encourage believers to imagine the kisses of Christ's mouth, a God who takes, comes and consumes, and believers who melt, and are moulded and pass out in ecstatic desire. Add to this the excitable cries of revivalist gatherings, the swoonings of recipients of the Toronto Blessing, the body language of charismatic believers, and the social and theological stress on intimacy, and it seems that Dionysus is back.

Robert Runcie is certainly right when he suggests that some evangelicals, in their pursuit of success and a ready market for the Gospel, are far too content to embrace the tasteless for the sake of a few converts. In ignoring beauty, art and a theology of any substance, evangelicals offer a culturally related version of the Gospel that ultimately self-destructs. It is always in vogue, but ultimately disposable; religion comes as a fashion accessory, not a necessity.

How though, can a manifestly popular religion be described as a failure? The answer lies in the depth and breadth of traditions that worshippers are allowed to appeal to. Contemporary Christian worship of the type attacked by Runcie celebrates passion, romance and feeling - with God. Believers sing about what it is like to know God in this way. Creeds, liturgy and sacraments - and 2,000 years of Christian tradition - have been abandoned for therapeutic religion that stresses the offering of emotions. Failure follows because people are only united in worship by harmonised feelings: doctrinal schism and sectarianism are waiting around the corner. Moreover, this type of worship only works as antidote to social realism - it does not engage with life as it is. It is wish-fulfilment, a suspiciously narcissistic grammar of ascent that encourages the worshipper to imagine that they are at the centre of God's attention.

and can have a cuddle or care any time they ask.

So, behind the argument over taste there are serious concerns. Runcie's attack was not just stating a preference for the superiority of Schubert over the Spice Girls. The issue is one of substance. In singling out certain types of evangelical worship for criticism, Runcie is suggesting that there is a link between their theological and aesthetic vacuity and the declining number of communicants. In preferring hymns like "Thine be the Glory" to choruses that offer sentiments such as "Lord, I Just Want To Cuddle You", or lyrics that celebrate and anticipate a feeling of communion with Christ, the issue is as much about theology as it is about taste. The latter type of song domesticates God, turning Jesus into a romantic hero. This religion is an adventure theme park - thrills, spills and lots of fun - but ultimately not real.

Bad Taste, then, is not the issue. The key concern is a style of worship which does not offer any real theological basis for individuals to mature in their faith. The danger is that once people have become bored with anomaly and escapist worship they will not move on to a style which allows room for spiritual development. They will simply chuck the whole product away.

* *Faith & Reason* is edited by Paul Valley

Births, Marriages & Deaths

BIRTHS

HARRISON: On 13 February to Michael and Fiona, a darling daughter, Clara Anna, a much-wanted sister for Ellen and Nicholas.

TAYLOR/TELLING: On 18 February, to Suzanne and Marc, a son, Miko James Telling.

WATSON: Rapper and Sally (née Ball) today announced the birth of Tabitha Madonna Rose on 10 February, a healthy baby girl.

DEATHS

MARTIN: On 10 February, suddenly in France, Michael Anthony of Westhurn, much-loved partner of Jeanne, and the beloved son of Beverly and William. Requiem Mass has been said in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR GAZETTE BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent.

1 CANADA SQUARE, CANARY WHARF, LONDON E14 5JU, TELEPHONE 0171-293 2011, 24-hour answering machine 0171-293 2012) or faxed to 0171-293 2010, and are charged at 25p a line (VAT extra).

Changing of the Guard

From 1 January, the Royal Guardsman Regimental Band, the Royal Guards, will be known as the Royal Guardsman Regimental Band, the Royal Guards.

BIRTHDAYS

DUKE OF BEAUFORT: 42; Mr Derek Randall, writer; 69; Mr Jeremy Brooks, chairman, Price Waterhouse Coopers; 58; Mr Jim Cousins MP; 53; Lady Digby, former chairman, Southern Regional Advisory Board; 63; Lord Ezra, former chairman, Coal Board; 78; Mr Peter Fonda, actor; 57

Westwood is putting children of 13 in dresses made for mum. Fun, fashion or schoolgirl fetish?

The punk queen's trawl of playgrounds to find catwalk models has been causing outrage, reports Ian Burrell

Vivienne Westwood, the First Lady of punk, has come full circle: she now wants young ladies to dress like their mothers. Unfortunately, her decision to use girls as young as 13 to display her latest collection has created a new furor over the use of schoolgirl models.

While MPs expressed moral outrage, the fashion world defended the right of young teenagers to model designer clothes, and Westwood – once the queen of controversy – sought yesterday to quell the row.

Her office said: "We are not using young girls to cause a sensation but to prove a point that they can look amazingly beautiful in their mother's clothes." It issued a statement from the designer criticising young girls who dressed in the youth fashion of their peers. "Just because you are chasing about a bit ... doesn't give you the right to insult your mother," she said.

Westwood went on to describe her new Red Label collection which will be shown tomorrow at the opening of London Fashion Week. "The clothes are for grown-ups and I admit they're ladylike, exquisitely so," she wrote.

It all sounded rather stuffy from the designer who has sent models down the catwalk in fake-fur G-strings and phallic-symbol unitards. Was this the woman who publicly demonstrated that she was wearing no knickers when she went to Buckingham Palace to collect her OBE from the Queen in 1992?

Last month the 53-year-old designer described the Spice Girls pop group as "animals" who left her "morally outraged". Was she going soft?

Cynical observers noted that



Youth cult: Teenage models Amber Valetta (left), Kate Moss (centre) and Shalom in Paris, 1993; next stop was New York. Photograph: Herbie Knott

the mistress of hype had diverted the spotlight of London Fashion Week away from the plain show at the Natural History Museum and onto her own "runway" set up at the Dorchester hotel.

Others ascribed her use of 13-year-old models to a cynical attempt to ex-

plot the cult of the schoolgirl in the Japanese fashion market. One critic said: "She is absolutely huge in Japan. The pictures of the show will go down a storm."

Shortly before Christmas, Westwood and her team began scouring schools and

stage schools for young talent. Brenda Gray, registrar at the Arts Educational School in London, said: "Her office phoned me and said they wanted to look for girls between the ages of 14 and 18 to look like English roses."

Auditions were arranged and the



Vivienne Westwood: A career fashioned by controversy

unsuitable. "The girls tell me that they are very exotic but not at all revealing. I just hope that's the case," she said.

Other models were picked from Wimbledon High School in south-west London and the Sylvia Young Drama School, north London. In all, Westwood selected 20 girls ranging in age from 13 to 18. One, 22, was told that she looked "too sophisticated" for the assignment.

Yesterday, as Lady Olga Maitland, Conservative MP for Sutton and Cheam, south London, decried the "abuse" of teenagers, designers sought to defend the *grande dame* of British fashion.

Wayne Hemingway, the founder of Red or Dead, which is also showing at London Fashion Week, pointed out that Westwood's Red Label collection was aimed at a younger buyer. He said: "I would not be happy if kids that age were wearing our clothes to look sexy, but there is nothing wrong with kids wearing designer clothes if their parents can afford it."

At the Storm model agency in London, which took Kate Moss onto its books at the age of 14, models are normally expected to finish their GCSEs before starting work. Schoolgirls are only given work at weekends or in their holidays. Paula Karaikoo, for the agency, said: "It's a really tough business. Young girls are not physically developed or emotionally adept at dealing with rejection."

In which case, the greatest danger to the young models may be the rejection in the school playground when they arrive in their newly acquired Vivienne Westwood, looking just like

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REAL LIFE

THE KINDEST CUT Why more and more women want caesareans

IT IS, ARE YOU?

Canned tomatoes get gene treatment

Nicholas Schoon

Canned tomatoes – Britain's top selling tinned food – may soon be available in a genetically engineered form. Leading drug and seeds group Zeneca is seeking government approval to market and sell the product.

Pealed, canned tomatoes – whole or chopped – sell in the same quantities as baked beans and are a staple in millions of British kitchens. We eat 230,000 tonnes of canned tomatoes – a market worth about £160m – a year.

Once a genetically engineered form penetrates this market theo the revolutionary and somewhat feared new biotechnology can truly be said to have been embraced by Britons.

The British experience with genetically engineered tomato puree suggests the canned variety can succeed.

Since being launched a year ago, this puree has proved very popular in two leading supermarket chains, Sainsbury and Sainsbury's, taking half the market.

It is sold under own-label brands and the packaging carries the information that the food is derived from a "genetically modified organism" (GMO).

Zeneca, which was once part of chemical giant ICI, owns the rights to a GMO variety of tomato which, when ripe, stays firm for longer, both on the stalk and after being picked.

This variety is used to make the puree and is the one which Zeneca plans to can. Genetic engineering was used to insert a gene from one kind of tomato to among the genes of the target variety, using a bacterium as the carrier for the new DNA.

This gene, passed on from generation to generation

through the seeds, acts to block the production of an enzyme which plays a key role in making ripe tomatoes become mushy. The new, long-life tomato suits modern farming and food processing methods and is therefore cheaper.

The genetically-engineered tomato puree, sold by Sainsbury and Sainsbury's, is cheaper than conventional brands, which explains why it has sold so well.

Now Zeneca has quietly applied to the Government's Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes for permission to sell the peeled tomato in cans.

It made no public announcement, but its application appears on the agenda for next week's committee meeting.

The GMO tomato also includes a gene conferring resistance to an antibiotic, kanamycin, a drug used to kill

bacteria. This was needed in order to create the new, long-life variety.

But Nigel Poole, head of regulatory affairs for Zeneca seeds, said this gene and all the others were destroyed during the pre-canning processing of the tomatoes at high temperatures. The heat fragments the DNA genetic material.

"We've not yet decided if we will seek to market the GMO canned tomatoes, and if we do it'll be about two years before they're on the supermarket shelves," he said.

Zeneca would use the supermarket own brands as it did with the puree. It would also insist that the label on the cans declared the contents as a GMO.

"We will also want to grow the tomatoes here in Europe, in Spain and other warmer countries" he said. The tomatoes for the puree are grown in California.

MoD says sorry to bullied woman

The Ministry of Defence broke with tradition yesterday when, for the first time, it publicly apologised to a female officer about her treatment in the Army.

In a landmark case, the Army offered a public apology to former lieutenant Alison Cook days before the opening of an industrial tribunal. Ms Cook, 33, had claimed discrimination against the MoD after she was subjected to bullying by male officers over a year between 1992 and 1993, including one incident where CS gas canisters were thrown into her shower room.

The industrial tribunal was due to start in Southampton, Hampshire, next Monday but it was halted after an out-of-court settlement.

Richard French, Ms Cook's barrister, said yesterday: "Alison Cook, a lieutenant in the Army who left in 1995 claiming sexual discrimination and harass-

ment, today accepted an undisclosed sum and apology from the Ministry of Defence for 'unacceptable treatment from some junior officers whilst serving with the Royal Artillery'.

The MoD went on to say that they accepted that such treatment may have had an adverse effect on Miss Cook's confidence and will to continue with her Army career.

She was delighted with the outcome. An apology means more than anything to her. She had never thought in terms of a financial settlement ... She just wanted to be vindicated.

Mr French made it clear that the Army was not admitting liability for discrimination or harassment. However, he added: "An apology had great significance for my client. My own personal view is that the mere fact that the MoD was prepared to apologise in public for some-

thing that occurred five years ago is in itself significant.

This is the first time such an apology has been forthcoming from the forces, as well as recognition that something had gone wrong.

Mr French, who specialises in employment discrimination and took Ms Cook's case on free of charge, added: "For a lot of women all that they want is for someone to recognise that something happened which should not have happened."

The settlement is believed to run into thousands of pounds.

Ms Cook joined the Army in 1984 and remained in the ranks for eight years. In 1992 she was persuaded to seek a commission and later graduated from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. She was then posted to Germany with the Royal Artillery regiment but left in 1995.

Ms Cook, speaking from her home in Winchester, Hampshire, last night said: "I am absolutely delighted with it. I couldn't be happier with the outcome. I never expected it."

She said she believed the apology was a positive sign of change in the armed forces: "They have accepted that there was unacceptable treatment levelled at me. I think people are going to have an awful lot of respect for them for owning up. This puts them in a very good light. They have accepted what happened and are willing to say sorry."

"Since I have left there have been so many changes. I am aware from my friends who are still serving that they are stamping out initiation ceremonies and bringing in equal opportunities training. That simply did not exist in 1992. They are starting to make changes."

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WHO KILLED CARL BRIDGEWATER?

He may be free, but so is the real killer

With the vindication of the Bridgewater Three, attention is focused on a former suspect

Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

The release of the three men falsely convicted of Carl Bridgewater's murder raises one obvious question: who did kill the 13-year-old newspaper delivery boy.

It also raises the issue of responsibility – who caused three men to spend 18 years in jail for a crime they did not commit and a fourth man to die in prison while serving a 10-year stretch.

The case appears to be a classic example of what Sir Paul Condon, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, condemned in 1993 as "noble cause"

corruption in which a small group of detectives were prepared to "massage the evidence" and "bend the rules".

Others might be more blunt and say "make up the evidence to fit the crime".

With the vindication of the Bridgewater Three, attention has now turned to a former suspect called Hubert Spencer.

At one stage Spencer was a key suspect with several strong links to the newspaper boy's death.

Witnesses recalled seeing a blue Vauxhall Viva car driven into Yew Tree Farm, Wordsley, Shropshire, shortly before Carl's murder in September 1978 by a man in a dark blue

uniform. Police inquiries discovered that Spencer, an ambulance liaison officer who lived locally, owned such a car and uniform – a rare combination.

At first Spencer did not tell detectives that he knew Yew Tree Farm, its owners and Carl, and that he was interested in collecting antiques – which was thought to be the motive for the original burglary. A hospital log which would confirm his movements is missing although he had an alibi witness – Barbara Riebold who worked with him at the local Corbett hospital.

Spencer, now 56, also used to shoot at the farm. Shortly after the killing he

found a piece of cardboard, which cast suspicions of other people in the ambulance service, but this was later dismissed as a "red herring".

Police discovered by the time of their second interview with Spencer that from 1969 to 1974 he had lived in the same street as Carl, who used to play with his daughter.

Further police inquiries suddenly stopped when three West Midlands police officers from Number 4 Regional Crime Squad, who were assisting Staffordshire police in the murder inquiry, achieved the supposed "breakthrough" from the alleged confessions. In the ap-

parent desire to get a result, the police appeared to have ignored other possible leads, however promising.

But an even more disturbing event provided a further possible link between Spencer and the Bridgewater case a few weeks after the conviction of the four men. During a Christmas party half a mile from Yew Tree Farm Spencer loaded a shotgun and shot his friend Hubert Wilkes, 70, through the head as he sat on a sofa. He then attacked and shot at his wife and Wilkes's daughter.

At his trial Spencer was never able to explain what had happened. He was convicted of the

Wilkes murder in July 1980 and sentenced to life imprisonment. At the first appeal hearing of the Bridgewater case in 1989, the judges ruled that they had "no doubt" whatever hub that Hubert Spencer had nothing whatever to do with the killing of Carl Bridgewater.

He was released on life licence in 1994 after serving 14 years, remarried and moved to the small Lincolnshire village of Bicker, 10 miles from Boston.

He said yesterday: "It's incredible they are being released. I expect more pressure will be put on me but my conscience is clear, I am not perturbed.

"If the Hickeys have not

done it, it is the right decision to let them out. When people get off on appeal, it always leaves a case unsettled. I'm just surprised that the Crown has dropped the case."

He later told reporters he would only speak to them for money and that he had already sold his story. "I've been offered £100 a word by someone else. The Hickey family have made a fortune so you lot can start coughing up. Can you give me a few hundred quid now?"

Spencer may now face fresh questioning from Merseyside police who are continuing a long-running investigation into the case.



Taste of freedom: Michael Hickey kissing the ground outside the High Court yesterday and Hubert Spencer (below, right), a suspect in the case. Photograph: Kevin Larmour

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Fake signature led to dead man's sentence

Patricia Wynn Davies

Patrick Molloy, who died without ever having an appeal, had consistently insisted that police had shown him a confession under caution on which he read Vincent Hickey's name.

Michael Mansfield QC told the Appeal Court yesterday that Mr Molloy had told his solicitors at the first opportunity that that was what had happened at Wombourne police station, near Wolverhampton.

But the defence was never developed at the trial and the Hickey statement, which Mr Molloy was shown by police was never produced in court.

Vincent Hickey had sought to put the three others in the firing line in a bid to secure immunity from prosecution when he was arrested over a hung-up robbery at another farmhouse, Chapel Farm, close to the Yew Tree Farm, the scene of the murder. But, said Jeremy Roberts QC, counsel for the Crown, "the important point is that all his ad-

missions were verbal. He never made a written statement, although he offered to make one several times."

But it was the new scientific evidence, shown to the Crown for the first time on Monday of last week, that led to freedom for the three men yesterday. Mr Roberts said: "On this one ground alone, we have come to the conclusion that we cannot properly resist the arguments put forward by the appellants."

The new tests on the 19-year-old documents were only possible because an exhibit had been stapled to Mr Molloy's confession, possibly by the very officers involved in the fabrication, preventing incriminating evidence from fading or being worn away over time.

The signature in the name of Vincent Hickey was quite different from his real signature and was "clearly a forgery", Mr Roberts said.

Esda tests on Mr Molloy's confession had been originally taken in 1990 as part of fresh in-

quiry by a Home Office handwriting expert and Robert Hadley, an independent forensic scientist. Jim Nichol, the men's solicitor, said yesterday that although that test revealed Vincent Hickey's name, there was nothing else to go on.

Once Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, had decided to refer the case back to the Appeal Court, for different reasons, last July, Mr Nichol's "gut instinct" told him to commission a fresh Esda test.

There was little doubt yesterday that the new evidence presented to the Appeal Court will lead to the quashing of the convictions. Alun Jones QC, counsel for Vincent Hickey, said an attempt was being to suggest that the faults in the trial were simply those of two junior officers. He said: "Vincent Hickey has been waiting for his day in court for 18 years. His mother and brothers and sisters are in court and they resent what is being done as a damage limitation exercise."

Perils of new life outside jail



Reunited: Ann Skett and Vincent Hickey yesterday

Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

The final irony in the case of the Bridgewater Three is that they might have had a far better chance of a new life if they had committed a crime. As Michael and Vincent Hickey and James Robinson try to come to terms with the last 18 years, they will receive none of the help or rehabilitation that convicted criminals could expect.

Psychologists and probation officers say the effect on those wrongfully convicted can be compared to hostages held in the Middle East. Many face severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. "No amount of compensation will pay for what they've been through," said David Boag, a chartered forensic psychologist who has worked in prisons for nearly 30 years. "This would devastate anybody. It is likely to have very negative effects on their life for a very long time."

"At the moment they will be very excited about being released, but after a while they could be overwhelmed by feelings of depression."

People who were wrongfully held often did suffer post-traumatic stress disorder: "They keep on going over and over the case. They can't get shot of it. They keep reliving the experience."

He said there were four main stages people went through: "Sometimes they go into denial and can't believe it's happened – that they have actually been released. Then there is anger and resentment that it happened in the first place. After that they may become emotionally drained and depressed. They feel like they are disappearing down the black hole. Then there is the final adjustment and acceptance but you don't know how long it can take."

It is a familiar tale to previous victims of injustice. A year after his release Paddy Hill, one of the Birmingham Six, said in a newspaper interview: "Sometimes I feel like bursting into tears, with tasks such as opening a bank account."

or I have just to walk away. There are times when I wish I was back in jail."

In the cases of the Guildford Four, they found different ways of adjusting. While Gerard Conlon achieved fame and money through his best-selling autobiography, *In the Name of the Father*, and Paul Hill married into the Kennedy clan, the other two, Patrick Armstrong and Carole Richardson, have quietly faded into obscurity.

In purely practical terms the Bridgewater Three will have to adjust to a very different world to the one they left in 1979. Since then the Cold War has ended, the Berlin Wall has come down, Communism has collapsed in Central and Eastern Europe and Nelson Mandela has been released. In day-to-day life back in 1979, simple electronic calculators were prized pieces of advanced technology, office workers used typewriters and the equivalents of desk-top PCs took up small rooms. Remote controls for televisions were still a thing of the future as were hole-in-the-wall cash dispensers. "There have been major changes in society," said Dr Gisli Gudjonsson, reader in forensic psychology at the University of London. "They will not be used to the increased traffic or the differences in technology. They may find it terrifying to get on a bus or a train or the Tube. And if people are let out suddenly they have an opportunity to adjust."

This is the major problem psychologists agree that the Bridgewater Three face. They will not have had any preparation which long-term prisoners normally receive and they will not be supervised by the probation service on their release. For the convicted criminal, the probation service must make sure there is accommodation arranged, that prisoners are signed up at social security and are connected to employment services. With no such service for the wrongfully convicted, they could even have problems even with tasks such as opening a bank account.

Gummer – a green voice in a grey wilderness

Something strange is going on. A Cabinet minister has been running around for three years saying the sky is falling, and nobody pays a blind bit of notice. He was at it again this week. "The sea is rising. The world is heating up. Governments have to do something." It was John Gummer, explaining that humankind has changed and is changing the world's climate. Oh, him, you might say. Indeed, the very same politician who called on Wednesday for planning committees to let rich people build "exceptional" new stately homes in open countryside. But do not let that put you off. On climate change, he is right and should be taken seriously.

In 20 years' time, the British climate is almost certain to be slightly but significantly warmer than now. Mr Gummer warned that different crops will be grown and several animal species will be driven northwards into Scotland or extinction. It is remarkable to hear a government minister speaking in such definite and apocalyptic terms, and perhaps it is partly because he sounds so unlike our expectations of a politician that we do not pay enough attention to what he says.

He has been saying it for some time. At a conference in Geneva six months ago, he compared the lack of international action on global warming to the failure of the League of Nations to prevent the Second World War. We are so impressed by his green passion that we can forgive him this hyperbole. Climate change is real. We have already burnt so much

fuel that the world's weather will be different in the next century from what it would have been without human intervention. We do not yet know what many of the differences will be. And we do not know how big or damaging the changes will be. Poorer countries could be badly affected, while some countries, including the United States and Russia, could benefit agriculturally from a small amount of warming. But the risks are high and there is a strong argument for mending about with the world's climate as little as possible. This means taking quite dramatic action quickly.

The trouble is that the vast majority of us are in two minds, which operate on different timescales. Sure, we care about the future of the planet, maybe not for ourselves but certainly for our children. And yes, we want to use less petrol, electricity and gas. In our other mind, though, we love our cars and we need our white goods and electric gizmos. This is a dichotomy that is not well recognised by green pressure groups, which fantasise about people being priced out of their cars and onto cleaner public transport. But we love our cars, and with very good reason. Petrol taxes may be going up and up, but it does not matter – we are still going to drive door-to-door in private, comfortable, music-filled bubbles.

And it is this short-term mind that votes. Even when climate change does present itself as a short-term problem, as it did yesterday with the announcement by the water companies of a continuing drought in south-east



England, the political effects are confusing. Because of the hostility generated by water privatisation, global warming is seen as just another excuse on the part of fat cats who do not want to pay to repair their leaky pipes. The charge is unfair, but one is tempted to ask – if Mediterranean countries can supply their population with water, why can't we?

In a sense, it is remarkable that the Government has achieved so much, acting on a 20-year problem in a five-yearly political system. Mr Gummer has been lucky, in that the drive to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases has coincided with Britain's power stations switching from coal to gas, which means we will quite accidentally meet the target for 2000, which was set at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. But he must also take the credit for pushing many of the right policies. Putting up petrol tax by 5 per cent more than inflation every year may not force us into trains and buses, but eventually it will encourage us to buy cars with smaller engines. "Green taxes" on electricity generation and air transport are more difficult, but even here Mr Gummer has said some of the right things. Jet fuel is presently untaxed, partly because it would need international agreement, and he has asked the international civil aviation body to look at it – "we do not mean look at it and say nothing can be done", he said.

The Labour Party looks as if it would follow the same general course in government – if only because green levies could be the

answer to Gordon Brown's Need To Raise Taxes that dare not speak its name. Almost unnoticed earlier this month, Labour passed up the chance to embarrass the Government in the Commons. Dawn Primarolo, Mr Brown's junior responsible for environmental taxes, did not oppose the doubling of the Tory airport tax in the Finance Bill. This was one issue where the Ulster Unionists could have been tempted to vote with Labour, because Northern Ireland is dependent on air links. But the airport tax is a sound environmental measure: Ms Primarolo, once dubbed Red Dawn as Tony Benn's adjutant, has passed through a Pink phase to become Green Dawn.

The environmentalists constantly bemoan Mr Gummer's isolation in a predominantly "grey" rather than green Government, along with Tony Blair's apparent lack of interest in environmental issues, and Michael Meacher's low status as the opposition's green spokesman. But it is unrealistic to expect much more of either main party, especially in the run-up to an election fought on short-term issues.

The right response to global warming is to tax energy as much as possible and to take a leading role in persuading other countries to impose green taxes too, rather than seeking to undercut each other. Mr Gummer deserves our praise for doing more than could be expected. We'll just have to forgive him the nonsense about stately homes.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ms S: does the medical profession always know best?

Sir: When I was born in 1941, my mother was strongly advised to have a Caesarean (leading article, 19 February, letters, 21 February). She refused, for a variety of reasons that seemed right at the time, and her choice was respected. That refusal resulted in my cerebral palsy.

I wish for my sake that my mother's decision had been overruled. I should add that my mother did also; when Ms S's daughter grows up, she may well be grateful for the decision which gave her life.

ANN DAY
Leicester

Sir: Whatever the facts of the Ms S case, the real issue is not about the woman's rights over those of her unborn child, but the woman's right to make decisions about herself and her unborn child, which includes the right to reject the opinion of the medical profession.

Like everyone else, the medical profession goes through fads and fashions and the Caesarean section is one of the latest fads in obstetrics. Recent research shows that probably only around 6 per cent of Caesarean sections are medically necessary and yet in the United States (where litigation is common) up to 25 per cent of babies are born this way. In a survey carried out for her book *Caesarean Birth in Britain* Professor Wendy Savage asked obstetricians this very question, and 46.8 per cent said that fear of litigation is often a factor in performing sections.

All women know that pregnancy and birth carry risks. Caesarean section carries more risks than

vaginal delivery and yet women are undergoing unnecessary operations because they believe that doctors are giving them advice in their own best interest. Ultimately it is the woman who has to live with the consequences of any decisions made, and therefore it should be she who weighs up the risks involved and makes the final decision. For some women this will always be to trust the professionals. Others will choose to trust their own research or even nature. That should be their decision.

ISOBEL VELLA
Huddfield, Derbyshire

Sir: Seeking the help of a doctor is an act which imposes obligations on the patient, namely to realise that doctors, once a problem is placed in their hands, have duties and obligations as well. Those duties and obligations may well conflict with the wishes of the patient.

It is not good enough simply to criticise the doctors. If Parliament is not happy to leave the Mental Health Act decision to them, then it ought to appoint and pay for a suitable duty judge on site, who can decide, with binding judicial authority, whether treatment is to be administered or not. Whether putting a lawyer in charge of doctors is a good thing would remain to be seen. My view is that it would be a good thing for the doctors. Patients would not have to suffer any medical professional arrogance, which undoubtedly exists, and the doctor wouldn't have to take the risk for the decision which was made.

ANDREW COHEN
Guildford, Surrey

Putting children first in adoption

Sir: The case of Edita Keranovic (report, 18 February) has once again focused attention on international adoption which, at best, offers a solution for a very small number of children and, at worst, makes large numbers of others vulnerable to exploitation.

Agencies such as the Romanian Orphanage Trust are working to promote long-term, in-country solutions to child care problems in Central and Eastern Europe. We have had considerable success in Romania where we have got over 3,000 children out of orphanages and back into family life, entirely within the framework of Romanian law. Eighty percent of these children have returned to their original or extended family. When this is not possible, there are plenty of Romanian families willing to adopt.

Solutions can be found which prioritise the right and the best interests of children. These rights, and those of their families, should be safeguarded. International adoption should never be the first recourse.

CATHERINE STEVENS
Head of Fundraising
The Romanian Orphanage Trust
London EC4

Low pollution risk from supertankers

Sir: By stating that "between 30 and 60 per cent of all supertankers cause a devastating pollution incident during their lives" (Letters, 12 February), Professor Disney and his son have totally misrepresented the data in the reference they quote.

Our own database shows that, based on the period since 1974, the actual percentage of "supertankers" suffering a spill of over 10,000 tonnes during their lifetime is, at most, between 2 and 4 per cent. Even this is an over-estimate, since the annual incidence of oil spills has dropped significantly since the 1970s.

CATHERINE GREY
International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation
London EC3

Morals of weather

Sir: Janet Hind Duff (Letters, 19 February) is weary of hearing television presenters making our future weather sound like a wartime bombing raid. I am similarly weary of the facile adjectives of moral approval or disapproval reminiscent of wartime.

Hot weather is "good", even though many people, like me, thoroughly dislike hot weather. Rain is "bad", even if our reservoirs are three-quarters empty. Is it weather forecasting meant to be an amoral science?

MILES HOWARTH
Chelmsford,
Essex

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Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret we are unable to acknowledge unpublished letters.

LETTER from THE EDITOR

How to win the female vote

Sir: It is no surprise that three out of four women are dissatisfied with the political parties ("Women's groups set doorstep test for candidates", 19 February).

Research for MORI for the Fawcett Society last year showed that women were less likely than men to trust any of the parties, or the party leaders. A survey by the Women's Communication Centre produced an agenda using women's own words that was very different from the agenda of any of the main political parties. The same survey showed women rejecting a political system that was just about "one party bashing another".

Research by Demos has revealed a deep alienation from politics, particularly among younger women.

What these studies all show is a serious and growing lack of faith among women in our political system. Unfortunately the response from both politicians and the media is often to assume that this is a problem of presentation, not policies. Discussion about the need to appeal to women voters in the past few months has all too often focused on which of the party leaders is more physically attractive, rather than which has the most attractive policies.

It is time that politicians realised that it will take more than lip service to win women's votes. We want real commitments to policies to improve life for us and our families.

SHELagh DIPLOCK
Director
The Fawcett Society
London EC2

Reading the genetic tea-leaves

Sir: Genetic testing (report, 19 February) is a new, glamorous, unproven technique that may eventually predict, in part, an individual's life expectancy. By contrast diet, cholesterol, exercise and lifestyle are known risk factors for heart disease and stroke. As a doctor undertaking insurance medicals, I am surprised that this information is consistently ignored. By contrast, physical examination still requires me to exclude tertiary syphilis (pupil reactions and knee jerks) and tuberculosis (chest expansion).

I have the impression that insurance companies work in a manner that has, in many cases, more in common with reading tea-leaves than providing fair and accurate premiums for their clients. Genetic testing as it stands and will stand until a generation or more of individuals and families have been studied, adds more tea than science.

ELIZABETH ARMSTRONG
London SW7

Keep commerce out of public libraries

Sir: The Government's support for "changed patterns of working" for public libraries (report, 20 February) follows a number of experiments in Sunday opening. These experiments have been inspired by a dubious wish to embrace the commercial values of the "market place" rather than by a genuine desire to improve public services.

There is a strong element of window dressing in making one or two highly visible improvements to the service while the standard of the service as a whole is declining. In this atmosphere of enforced cuts, public libraries might be well advised to maintain existing services and hours of opening rather than introducing Sunday opening.

GRAHAM HEDGES
Secretary
Librarians' Christian Fellowship
Ifford, Essex

I've had a week of strange perspectives. I helped judge some press awards in the BT Tower, then had lunch at the top, revelling over London, peering down at the squares, parks and rooftop gardens. It was most unsettling. A couple of days later, I reworked a television documentary from the 1992 general election campaign. Watching, five years on, film of Kinnoch in a狂喜 of triumph, John Smith beaming, and Tory strategists looking defeated and shellshocked was ... well, unsettling too – not because John Major won, against everyone's expectations, but because he is just so stickily, gushingly, revoltingly omnipresent. Once great, he's now just Claud Money. There is only one way to save him for posterity now, though, it may seem a touch Sullivian.

It is for some commission or other to be given authority to gather up all the world's Monets – every one – and bury them in a sealed underground

Watching film from the 1992 election campaign was unsettling – it was a reminder of how little the political elite knew about the rest of the country

bunker. Every Monet monograph, collection, poster, tea-towel, card and scarf would then be burned. Slowly, decade by decade, the memory would fade into blankness. Monet would become as well-known as the lost painters of Greece and Rome. Then, around 2097, suddenly the hunker would be reopened. It would be like unwrapping paradise.

Journalists generally and editors certainly, are supposed to know what they think – to stride through the week without second thoughts or agonising. But as to whether the *Mail* was right to name the five Lawrence case youths as murderers, I lost sleep, or at any rate spent sleepless, agonising about my own hostility last week. Now the Bridgewater case – like the two big Irish mis trials of recent times – reminds us of the danger of leaping to judgement in a mood of bovine public rage. It is one of life's dreary, growing-up truths that justice and anger mix badly.

Both children enjoyed the brightness and brightness of the pictures and the elder had no difficulty at all in understanding that they were paintings of mood and emotion, not simply views, rooms or people. He has a big Hodgkin poster in his room now, to see such paintings as "difficult" requires a great deal of carefully cultivated adult art blindness.

What, on the other hand, is one supposed to say about

Andrew Marr

QUOTE UNQUOTE

Like so many people I used to think British justice was pretty good but it has flaws. If there were mistakes there must be the opportunity to put them right. It has taken a lot of grief to get this put right – Tim O'Malley, foreman juror at the original Bridgewater trial

He was a man of vision and leadership who profoundly changed the life of the Chinese people for the better – Baroness Thatcher, on the death of Deng Xiaoping

Thank you, but I'm sure you meant to say the first openly gay man in the Cabinet – Chris Smith, shadow health secretary, on being introduced to a Commons reception as the first gay man in the Cabinet if Labour wins the election

For the first time since Tony Blair was elected leader, people are beginning to imagine that Labour may yet lose the election, whatever the opinion polls say – Lord Desai, Labour peer

I'm just taking a holiday from the Old Testament to explore unknown territory. I expect that when I come back to the Bible I'll be glad to be home – Dr Alan Smithson, Bishop of Jarro, who is giving up the *Bible* for *Lord of the Rings* and reading the *Koran* each day

What the modern generation does not understand is that you can love people without going to bed with them – Lord Hutchinson, husband of the late Dame Peggy Ashcroft, who has been described in a new book as being promiscuous

19

the saturday story



Sacked: the massacre at Benin and one of the bronzes taken by the British. There is a campaign for such treasures to be returned.
Painting: Mary Evans Picture Library
Bronze: ©British Museum



The looting of Benin

Richard Gott reappraises a British outrage against a tiny African fiefdom 100 years ago

On the half-landing of the main staircase of the British Museum bangs a unique display of 50 bronzes, depicting small groups of African soldiers in military gear. These are just a small percentage of the 900 magnificent bronze sculptures, dating from the 16th century, that were seized from the palace of Benin during a British imperial rampage in west Africa 100 years ago, in February 1897.

The campaign against Benin, a small city-state east of Lagos in what is now southern Nigeria, involved the invasion and destruction of the state, the show trial of its king, the execution of its leading chiefs, the torching of the royal palace, and the burning of innumerable villages. Throughout the fighting, in which "friendly" black troops were put in the forward ranks, British forces were largely protected by the steady use of the Maxim machine-guns.

These typical atrocities of the British colonial era go unmentioned in the museum's accompanying wall notice, a continuing indication of Britain's official reluctance to come to terms with the real cost of its imperial past. Now Bernie Grant, the Labour MP, is backing a campaign for the looted treasures held in museums in London and Scotland to be returned to the King of Benin.

The British "punitive expedition" of 1897 did not just result in the seizure of the Benin bronzes. It also helped inspire Joseph Conrad's great novel *Heart of Darkness*. Thanks to the researches of the Swedish writer Sven Lindqvist, we have a detailed knowledge of what Conrad had been reading when he started writing at the end of 1898. In a new book, *Exterminate all the Brutes*, to be published this spring by Granta, Lindqvist uses this fearsome phrase of Conrad's anti-hero Kurtz to illuminate the European origins of genocide.

There will be much celebration this year of the 50th anniversary of Indian independence in 1947. There will be rather fewer memorial meetings recalling the centenary of the empire's heyday, when the British advanced into Africa like Hitler into the Ukraine.

The expedition against Benin was the culmination of several British assaults on the west African kingdoms that now form Nigeria. In 1897, it was the turn of Oba Ovonramwen, king of Benin, to deliver up his land, his people, and his treasures to a British army. The 40-year-old Oba had kept his kingdom isolated and independent, but the British were endlessly plotting to overcome his protectionist zeal. These were the years of the global rubber boom, consequent on John Dunlop's invention of the rubber inner tube. The virgin forests of Benin looked especially attractive.

The man who encompassed the Oba's downfall, Ralph Moor, was effectively the governor of Britain's Niger Coast protectorate. Moor, 36, had long argued that Benin should be opened up to trade, "if necessary by force". Like so many other colonial policemen, he had earlier been an inspector with the Royal Irish Constabulary, stifling rebellion in Ireland. Translated to Africa, he was to become one of Conrad's Kurtz-like figures, bringing "civilisation" to the natives.

Those sacrificed were criminals, already sentenced to death.

Unaware of these fearsome rituals, Lt Phillips pressed on regardless, and in Benin, it was decided that Chief Ologbosheri, the Oba's son-in-law, should be sent out with an armed group to check his advance.

On 4 January, 1897, on the road to Benin, the British force was ambushed by Ologbosheri. Many of the African carriers were captured, and many left dead. Lt Phillips himself and eight British officers were killed. Only two of the whites escaped. It was an unexpected and unusual victory.

Claims were later made that Lt Phillips' expedition was unarmed. This was not so. The British officers took no machine-guns, but they had revolvers with them. In the African heat, they had been kept locked up in boxes carried by their African porters.

The Oba treated what

was like an imminent British invasion as a national emergency. Later in the year, from eyewitnesses, the British pieced together an account of what went on, explaining why the British Museum's Benin bronzes, when first captured, were found to be heavily caked with blood.

"Twelve men were taken", with 12 cows, goats, sheep and chickens. "The animals were killed near the altar, and the blood from them was sprinkled on the big ivories and the brass work." The 12 prisoners, "with gagged ties in their mouths, and held each by four strong men", were led to a well where their heads were cut off.

This was portrayed as a form of human sacrifice, and the British used it to justify the seizure and destruction of Benin. Yet the eyewitness accounts also stressed that

Admiral Rawson's three-pronged attack on Benin City in February 1897 was no pushover. Each of his advancing columns met strong resistance from the local African population.

The first one was harassed by Benin soldiers for several days. The second one was attacked in its base camp and the commanding officer was killed.

The story of the third one is given in the diary of Felix Roth, a naval surgeon. He provides considerable evidence of the indiscriminate way in which British forces used their machine-guns to mow down Benin resistance. "We shelled the village, and cleared it of the natives. As the launch and surf-boats grounded, we jumped into the water... at once placed our Maxim guns in position, firing so as to clear the bush where the natives might be hiding."

Luckily, Roth recorded, "no white men were wounded; we all got off scot-free." This providential protection was easily explained. "Our black troops, with the scouts in front and a few Maxim's, do all the fighting."

Benin City was finally captured on 18 February. British marines put the palaces and compounds to the torch. Worse was to come. After three days, the fires got out of control, burning up what was left of the city as well as the equipment of the invading British force. Much of the carved woodwork in the Oba's palace was lost.

Thus was destroyed the great city of Benin. Miraculously, its extraordinary collection of bronze sculptures, depicting the chief events of the history of Benin's people, had survived. These treasures were removed by the British troops and subsequently auctioned by the Admiralty to defray the cost of the expedition. Most of

the 900 bronzes were bought by museums in Germany. Only a handful found their way to the British Museum.

For a further six months, a small British force harried the countryside in search of the Oba and his chiefs who had fled. Cattle were seized and villages destroyed. Not until August was the Oba cornered and brought back to his ruined city.

A immense throng was assembled to witness the ritual humiliation that the British imposed on their subject peoples. The Oba was required to kneel down in front of the British military "resident" of the town, and to literally bite the dust. Supported by two chiefs, the king made obeisance three times, rubbing his forehead on the ground three times. He was told that he had been deposed.

Some weeks later, Ralph Moor, the orchestrator of these events, arrived to prepare the final humiliation. "Now this is white man's country," Moor told the Oba. "There is only one king in the country, and that is the white man." The Oba and his chiefs were then subjected to a show trial, charged with the murder of Lt Phillips. Moor was the judge.

While the life of the Oba himself was spared, six of his chiefs were condemned to death. One of them, Ologbosheri, continued a guerrilla struggle against the British for another two years. But he too was eventually captured, and hanged. The Oba was exiled to Calabar, and replaced by Chief Obaseli, a controller of many villages with rubber-producing forests. These were soon sold off to European firms, to supply the rubber for Europe.

The British made much of the cruelties of the Benin kingdom in justifying their military action. In the jargon of the late 20th century, they would have claimed that they were acting to preserve human rights. Yet later investigation showed that the cruelties practised in Benin were not as great as originally pictured. The idea of Benin rule "as one of bloodstained despotism", wrote one historian, "appears at variance with the truth".

Years later, in January 1914, the exiled Oba died in Calabar. Ralph Moor committed suicide in Barnes in September 1909, drinking the potassium cyanide he had bought to kill the wasps in his garden. Admiral Rawson became governor of New South Wales. And less than 20 years after the British had so recklessly turned their machine-guns on the Africans of Benin, they were to receive a taste of their own medicine in the First World War.

Meanwhile, museums are refusing to return the Benin treasures. As one curator put it: "We are not in the business of redressing historic wrongs."

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jo brand's week



In these days of

increased aggression and bad behaviour, it seems that not even celebrities are safe from the danger of a harsh word or a flying fist. I noticed in the papers this week that a court case had taken place starring Eddie Izzard, a very nice bloke who wouldn't hurt a fly, not that personal characteristic has ever been much protection against yobs. Eddie, apparently, was waiting at a cab rank when he was abused by a passer-by who was obviously somewhat sozzled. In these situations, it is usually better just to take the flak and grin manly, but one can understand Eddie's reaction which involved giving as good as he got. Fisticuffs occurred, leaving Eddie with a punch in the gob. The perpetrator was fined and Eddie seemed happy that justice had been done.

The problem is that there are certain people who are always going to want to have a go at people they see on the telly and, therefore, I can't understand what possessed Eddie to go and wait at a cab rank at a time when drunk people were likely to be wandering by. I have to admit

I am like a bat out of hell from stage door to car, just in case an incarnation of Yobbo Man is hanging about outside looking for a ruck. I once felt rather put out when I arrived toute seule at *The Mrs Merton Show* in a cab to witness Chris Eubank being escorted out by four very heavy looking blokes. Then again, I expect far more people in an alcohol frenzy would want to have a go at taking him out, rather than me. I hope so anyway.

Whilst wandering across Leicester Square the other day I was greeted by a bloke selling *The Big Issue*, which besides being for a good cause is actually a decent magazine. We had a bit of a chat and he seemed very cheered off because he had only sold about four copies in the previous hour. However, that was not the source of his frustration. He said he had had enough of people being so rude. He didn't actually mind the fact that people didn't want to buy it, but it was the way in which they didn't want to buy it that wound him up. Apparently, the vast majority of people are very surly. Not a "No, thank you" or "Sorry, mate" ever emanates from their

lips. Now I suspect some of this may be to do with the nauseating attitude *The Big Issue* has taken towards *The Big Issue*, but I also think it has something to do with the fact that the vast majority of people are absolutely useless at communicating, so they don't bother to do anything. This contributes to the already fairly strong feelings of uselessness and low self-esteem that many homeless people have. So, if you've never bought a *Big Issue*, go on, treat yourself, you might actually enjoy it. And if you don't buy one, at least try and be polite.

The police landed themselves in it again recently when a comedian booked for a charity fund-raiser attended by black and Asian people

Asian women and the comic turned to them and said, "You're not from round here are you?" "No," piped up one of them, "we're from Oldham." It was his biggest laugh of the night.

Hamburg's prostitutes took some time off this week in protest about the closure of one of the city's hospitals. This hospital, which is in the docks area, has traditionally catered for those individuals who have been rejected by everyone else, in a city which has more millinaires than any other city in Germany. It seems as though many places like this are closing down, because they appear to be considered a bit of a luxury. We all seem to be turning our backs on the dispossessed and letting our humanity be eroded, bit by bit. Still, if the prostitutes stay on strike, one can be reassured that the city's bigwigs will eventually be spurred into action.

PS. I'm off on a week's holiday next week, so my mum will be doing my column for me. Let's hope she's not too good, or I'm out ... go for it!

مكنا من الارض

stage climax

Were the couple who made love in a theatre really performing in public?

david aaronovitch

It was only (Brian Conley said later) as he sang the final bars of *California Here I Come* that the singer realised that the couple in the box nearest the stage were having it away. At first the woman in the London theatre was merely giving the man what Mr Conley called "the Hugh Grant treatment" (pushing her fringe behind her ears, I suppose, and grinning manly), but then she "hitched up her skirt and was sitting on his lap, facing him. I missed quite a few notes". Mr Conley's revelations have, naturally, caused quite a stir. We are all anxious to know what exactly was going on here.

We may speculate that – perhaps – the woman's name was California (this is not impossible given the US tendency to name girls after places – as in Chelsea Clinton and Piddlethrythe Perot), and that the show, *Johnson*, was chosen because this particular song would add lustre to the act. I should also admit that one pleasant aspect of this story is that the man was described as past 40 and tubby, while the woman was a shapely young blonde. This suggests that the public sex was her idea, since his fantasies would have been just as well served by a quickie in a hotel room.

This view is strengthened by the fact that, having originally straddled her partner, facing towards him from the stage, she decided to complete her performance while looking down upon Mr Conley. Male readers will be familiar with such sudden shifts of interest on the part of the women that they love.

It is also just possible that this was a couple trying hard to conceive, and that temperature and time had conjured in a particular way. If so the couple deserve – at least – a standing ovation.

A quick flick through the relevant literature, however, reveals that – according to the authoritative *Daily Mirror* National Sex Survey – the most common sexual fantasy among all Britons, male and female, is making love in a public place. Thirty-three per cent of us, it seems, are gazing to do it over a table in a taverna, on a bus banquette, or in a vet's waiting room. Mind you, the same survey also discovered that 47 per



cent of Scottish males had recently had sex out of doors. I find this most unlikely, unless the survey was of farm animals. And even then...

But is it a box in a theatre a public place at all? Is it not rather a way of being private in public? After all, you are permitted to do all kinds of things in them that are prohibited in, say, the stalls. You may eat, you may drink. You may retreat to the back and clip your toenails or adjust your underwear. The Queen even has a loo at the back of her box, saving her from making an embarrassing appearance in the long, fidgety queue for the ladies, and saving Philip from the inevitable curiosity of men in next door urinals, when confronted with a flash of royal pink. She also has a drinks cabinet, so that she does not have to look out for an interval collection of glasses and bottles, bearing the damp legend "HM Queen".

Clearly things may be accomplished in a box in complete privacy, if necessary. The difficulty comes when this privacy fails to be total. So at what point does the private become public? Is it the crunching of crisps, the popping of champagne corks, an occasional soft belch, an over-appreciative snick of the lips, audible gasps of sexual excitement? Do these break box protocol, demanding complaints to the authorities, or admonitory tsking from neighbours? Or do they only count when the person to whom these sounds are attached is in plain view?

Let us extend the scope of this question. If you pass across your own window naked en route for the knicker drawer, is that indecent exposure? Or let us take the example of a urinal in the press gallery at the House of Commons, where the configuration of open window and porcelain means that an unguarded half turn will inevitably expose one to the full view of anyone standing in the courtyard below – should they have the capacity for instantly resolving such a necessarily fleeting image. Is that peeing in public?

If the answer is no, then there is a case for saying that our amatory couple did nothing wrong – and that the real culprit is Mr Conley, who should have averted his eyes and finished his song.

There was something strange about the reaction to the two men who this week admitted to undergoing sex changes: stranger than the sight of two burly males, a family doctor and a teacher, posing proudly in skirts and silk scarves. The coverage of their transsexuality, although inevitably intrusive, was largely positive. Yesterday's *Daily Mail* story, for example, was headlined "The New Look for Dr John Browne". *The Daily Telegraph*: "Patients back GP who is to become a woman", noting that his surgery had been flooded with calls of support. Even the tabloids ventured nothing more sensational than the *Sun's* "Sir tells kids: call me miss".

When newspapers best known for their adherence to the most traditional of family values – and their disgust for those who fall outside their parameters – begin covering such stories not just fairly but positively, there is something of a sea change going on.

The Nineties, it was predicted, would be the decade in which gender boundaries would finally dissolve, and to some extent this has been vindicated. There are an estimated 65,000 transsexuals in Britain, with a 50 per cent rise in demand for operations since the mid-Eighties. Appearances have become more androgynous, with long-haired men and shaven-headed women the norm, and merchandisers such as Calvin Klein capitalising on this with phenomenally successful androgynous scents.

Two of the most popular male entertainers of the moment wear women's clothes: the drag queen Lily Savage and the comedian Eddie Izzard, whose preferences for make-up and high heels are so established as to go largely unremarked upon. Their predecessors, Boy George and Julian Clary, are almost passé. These icons, together with increasing numbers of gay marriages and same-sex adoptions, have helped blur the boundaries and foster a more widespread acceptance that gender differences are not limited to those between man and woman.

A more sympathetic view towards transsexuality may also stem from recent scientific claims that this condition could have a physiological origin. It has been noted that transsexuals may have an extra X chromosome, while *Nature* magazine reported that in transsexuals the *stria terminalis*, a region of the brain, was more like a woman's.

But perhaps the biggest factor has been the growth of the cult of self-fulfilment. Imported from the United States, fostered by a thousand talk shows, this movement proposes that everyone has a right to feel personally fulfilled, whatever the cost. By this reasoning, Diane Blood has a moral right to have a baby by her dead husband. A patient has the right to plastic surgery on the NHS because their appearance makes them chronically depressed. Transsexuals have the right to change their birth certificate in order that they can feel properly female, and perhaps even adopt. In the face of such personal unhappiness, who would be churlish enough to deny them?

The problem is that personal fulfilment often comes at a cost – often someone else's personal fulfilment. The wife of Dr John Browne, Shirley, said yesterday that she felt bereaved by his change of gender.

Now, all numbers are in one sense imaginary; they're just ways of clumping together objects and concepts. But we can easily understand the idea of dropping one brick, or half a brick, on our feet. We can follow that the circumference of a circle is always twice its radius times a constant called π . We can understand that you need square roots to work out the length of the longest side of a right-angled triangle. The ancients had all those mathematical tools.

However, according to the "rules" of everyday maths, there is no such thing as a number that, multiplied by itself, gives you a negative number. Yet you can easily create equations in which that would be required: for example, when $x^2 = -1$. What values of x make this true? Clearly, when $x = \pm i$, where i is the square root of -1 .

You could grapple with this problem for a while before deciding it was insoluble. And for centuries that's what mathematicians did. But they also recognised that it would be really useful if i did have a square root.

The concept of i and of solving equations such as $x^2 - 2x + 2 = 0$ (which is true when $x = i + 1$ or $x = -1 + i$) was first formally introduced by the Italian mathematician Rafael Bombelli in the 16th century, though this tool didn't begin to be used properly for another 100 years, by Jean Robert Argand, a

French mathematician. Such solutions to equations, in which i is mixed in with "real" numbers, are known as "complex numbers".

Of course you wonder what use such equations are in the modern world, beyond giving them phobic schoolchildren (and parents) headaches. Ironically, many schoolchildren harbour dreams that couldn't be fulfilled without complex numbers.

Take a simple electrical circuit with a resistor consisting of a wound wire. Put an alternating current in. To understand and predict how the output of that circuit varies as you change its characteristics (the frequency of the alternating current, the thickness of the resistor wire), you'll have to use complex numbers.

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When a man loves being a woman

by Jojo Moyes



Change of life: Dr Joanna Browne (left), formerly Dr John Browne (left inset), and teacher Toni Bradley, previously Tony Bradley. Photographs: Apex (left)/Clive Postlethwaite

There is a widespread acceptance that gender differences are not limited to those between male and female... and a more sympathetic view of transsexuality

shoulders and coarse skin create physically unconvincing women, as do the exaggerated versions of femininity that many choose to become: less Jessica Lange than *Tootsie*.

And while they might see themselves as fully female, such enlightened views do not always extend to the public at large. Jacquie Gavin, a recently married transsexual, told last year how, as she sat in a pub with her husband, one man, followed by his friend and then their wives, approached simply in stare at her.

Stephanie Lloyd, a transsexual and the director of the Albany Gender Identity Clinic in Manchester, is among those who have gone on record to say that sex-change surgery should actually be more difficult to obtain, rather than easier. A very small proportion of those who approach the clinic for help go ahead with full surgery once they know the full facts.

Mike Evert, a factory worker and a father of three, would agree. He reversed his operation after suffering a nervous breakdown. He said afterwards: "It's one thing to want to become a woman – but a completely different thing to do it. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. You end up destroying your life and those of the people close to you. The world doesn't accept you. You always remain a misfit."

Women might actually ask why, without the benefits of childbirth, men would want to be women anyway. They are voluntarily choosing a lifestyle where they are more likely to be in low-status, low-satisfaction employment, where they will probably earn less than their male colleagues, and run the risk of being sexually harassed. They will have to learn that their short skirts and feminine high heels will put them at risk after dark, and that if they fail to heed these rules there will be little sympathy. Perhaps they should note that in surveys where respondents were asked if they would like to change sex – just for a day – while the vast majority of women said yes, the vast majority of men said no.

Once the first euphoric flush of femininity has died away, transsexuals may find that being a woman, let alone a constructed one, is not all it's cracked up to be. If this proves the case for Dr Browne and Mr Bradley, let's hope the sympathy that is currently propelling them through the difficult process of gender reassignment remains in place to help pick up the pieces.

It may be square, but it's wondrous

What made the original "seven wonders of the world" wonderful? Their elegance, perhaps; their locations (in the centres of old civilisations, such as Rhodes and Olympia), maybe. But more than anything, it was their size. They inspired wonder because they were fantastic feats of engineering.

Well, we are toolmaking apes; no wonder we felt proud of our artefacts. You might argue that the Hanging Gardens of Babylon were amazing for their vegetation, but putting plants on a terrace isn't hard. The trick is keeping them alive. (That was done using Archimedes' screws – which look like stationary drills inside a closed cylinder – to lift the water from the Euphrates river, up 75 feet to the trees and shrubs.)

But the original wonders have not survived very well. Of the original seven, only the pyramids are still standing. (The Taj Mahal was drafted in as a substitute wonder in modern times.) So what should we find wonderful in the modern world?

On Monday the BBC starts a new TV series, *Seven Wonders of the World*, in which it asks seven scientists to nominate their seven "modern wonders". Luminaries such as Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker offer ideas such as the digitisation of our voices by the phone network, the "ultimate mys-

The original seven wonders were built without it. But the technological world would not exist without the square root of -1, says Charles Arthur

tery" of consciousness, ultrasound sounds of babies in the womb, genes that control limb development, the songs of whales.

All very worthy, but none of those, on its own, gives a clue to how we have advanced in the few thousand years since the first of the original seven wonders was built. Yet we know that we have; even on a visceral level, we know that we're more advanced than those ancient peoples. Not physically, maybe, but mentally. We know something they didn't. But what? What is the tool we've made that sets us apart?

There is one overwhelming candidate, which appears in the first programme of the series about Aubrey Manning, professor of natural history at Edinburgh University. He calls it the result of "the human intellect firing on all cylinders". All the original seven wonders of the world were built without it. But almost nothing in the modern, technological world could be.

It's a tool you can't touch. Yet without it many of those things described above – the digital phone network, ultrasound monitors, the microphones able to pick up whale songs, autofocus cameras, the machines that sequence genes so that scientists can identify them – would be a dream. How appropriate then that the tool is itself imaginary: i , the square root of -1 .

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The feelings of their five children are unreported, but in 1993, St George's Hospital in London opened a clinic for children suffering gender identity disorders – including those undergoing trauma from suddenly acquiring two "mummies" or "daddies".

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Now, all numbers are in one sense imaginary; they're just ways of clumping together objects and concepts. But we can easily understand the idea of dropping one brick, or half a brick, on our feet. We can follow that the circumference of a circle is always twice its radius times a constant called π . We can understand that you need square roots to work out the length of the longest side of a right-angled triangle. The ancients had all those mathematical tools.

However, according to the "rules" of everyday maths, there is no such thing as a number that, multiplied by itself, gives you a negative number. Yet you can easily create equations in which that would be required: for example, when $x^2 = -1$. What values of x make this true? Clearly, when $x = \pm i$, where i is the square root of -1 .

You could grapple with this problem for a while before deciding it was insoluble. And for centuries that's what mathematicians did. But they also recognised that it would be really useful if i did have a square root.

The concept of i and of solving equations such as $x^2 - 2x + 2 = 0$ (which is true when $x = i + 1$ or $x = -1 + i$) was first formally introduced by the Italian mathematician Rafael Bombelli in the 16th century, though this tool didn't begin to be used properly for another 100 years, by Jean Robert Argand, a

French mathematician. Such solutions to equations, in which i is mixed in with "real" numbers, are known as "complex numbers".

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business & city

Business news desk: tel 0171-293 2636 fax 0171-293 2098
BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

Centrica director quits in political feud

Tories oppose Lambeth Council chief's non-executive job

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

A source at the council said: "We have had our own well-known problems here just like British Gas, including terrible service and a dreadful press reputation. Heather is sorting that out and I would have thought her experience would have come in useful at Centrica."

The farce culminated yesterday in the surprise resignation from Centrica's board of Heather Rabbatts, the former barrister and currently the high-profile chief executive of Lambeth Council, following a typically bitter internal feud among rival political factions in the London borough.

Ms Rabbatts told councillors last November of her intention to join the Centrica board as a non-executive director. She was drafted in to grapple with Lambeth's catalogue of problems two years ago on a £15,000 salary, reputed to be the highest in local government.

Most Labour members at Lambeth, a "hung" authority in which no party exercises overall control, had supported the job at Centrica. Ms Rabbatts had pledged to pay her £20,000 salary from Centrica, which covered her attendance at eight board meetings a year, to local charities. It was believed to be the first time a salaried council official had been appointed to a non-executive directorship.

Jim Dickson, leader of the Labour group, said yesterday: "Failure to support her appointment is a missed opportunity for Lambeth. It would have provided a productive trade in ideas between the public and private sectors for the benefit of both."



In demand: Heather Rabbatts, chief executive of Lambeth Council, resigned as a Centrica non-exec after a bizarre political battle among councillors

The Conservative group said this was a serious development. Mr Gentry denied that his local party's opposition to Ms Rabbatts' Centrica job was a break with normal Conservative policy, which encourages the injection of business principles into the public services.

Meanwhile the Liberal Democrats, who hold marginally the largest number of seats in the borough, also objected, though claimed they were not

opposed to such moves in principle. Mike Tuffrey, leader of the group, explained: "Most of our members were opposed to this. Her talents need to be addressed to the borough."

Ms Rabbatts was to be one of six non-executive directors at Centrica, alongside Sir Michael Perry, chairman, and Bill Cockburn who is also chief executive of WH Smith.

Mr Gardner, chief executive, said he was very sorry about the

resignation, but argued the board still had a strong team of non-executives. A Centrica spokeswoman said there would be no immediate move to replace her. "We are not going to rush into anything."

Ms Rabbatts declined to comment on the resignation, apart from saying it was a "matter of personal regret". However, a source close to the Lambeth chief executive said: "In terms of conflicts of interest, there just

wasn't one. As for whether she could spare the time to take this job on, she has said it would come out of her annual leave."

Centrica shares ended their first week on the stock market with a drop of 1.75p yesterday.

Soaring bonus payments push up staff costs by 17% at UBS

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Soaring bonus payments were behind a 17 per cent rise in staff costs last year at Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS), the giant Swiss banking group.

UBS, which has a large investment banking, asset management and private banking operation in the UK, said performance and profit-related bonuses were considerably higher than in 1995 because the bank had produced a good operating result.

The bank reported a Sfr348m (£146m) loss for the year, which was expected because UBS said last year it would take a special provision of Sfr4.4bn for future credit risks. Without

those charges, UBS would have reported a 7 per cent increase in profits, to about Sfr1.8bn.

In the UK, UBS is well known for its fund management group PDMF, run by Tony Dye, which last year lagged its competitors by moving out of shares just before the index headed for record levels.

A UBS official insisted yesterday that PDMF had remained very profitable during the year and had reported bonuses were considerably higher than in 1995 because the bank had produced a good operating result.

Mathis Caballavetta, chief executive of UBS, nevertheless admitted that PDMF had lagged behind the competition in 1996 because of a strict implementation of its "value investment" style. This resulted in disappointing results across the

globe in 1996, and over-cautious valuation of the US market.

Unlike many other banking groups, UBS does not want to become a global investment bank. Instead it plans to take a more selective approach to investment banking.

"We want to focus our efforts particularly on the expansion of our asset management business both at home and abroad..." Obviously an acquisition is a step that cannot be ruled out entirely," Mr Caballavetta said.

The bank has tracked down rightful owners for around a third of the SFr10m in dormant World War Two-era accounts, which Jewish groups believe may belong to Holocaust victims. But around Sfr3.5m came from two accounts held by per-

son who died shortly after the war, and were not victims of the Holocaust.

Mr Caballavetta said the bank was committed to working with an independent panel set up by Swiss bankers and Jewish groups last May.

"It must be said, however, that it is unlikely that any vast amounts to be distributed to any potential heirs of Holocaust victims will be uncovered," he said.

From May 1, UBS will adopt the acronym UBS as a global brand rather than spelling out its full name or using its German-language name as it has traditionally done in Switzerland. It is the second of the country's three big banks to change its brand.

over the past three years, below the cost of capital in the logistics division at least. Only they had "the vision, the strategy to produce growth," he suggested.

But Salvesen, which yesterday published a circular outlining its plans to pay a one-off £100m foreign income dividend as a precursor to demerging Aggreko, roundly denied the allegations.

Mr Grant criticised the recent performance of Salvesen under current chief executive Chris Masters, saying the transport logistics side of the group had become "obsessed with cost cutting" and accused the Aggreko generator hire operation of complacency. He claimed that the rate of return at the group had sunk from 25 per cent to under 15 per cent

returns. But he went on: "The key issue is that the days when logistics was all about trucks and warehouses are gone. Now managing the supply chain is about

information technology systems... and for that reason it is becoming less capital intensive."

He said suggestions by the rebels that they should buy out Aggreko did not make sense. "I simply do not see it as a tenable strategy to buy more transport businesses."

Mr Grant spent 25 years with Jaguar before being part of the team which helped turn round Lucas, which recently merged with Vauxhall of the US. The rebels, led by Sir Gerald Elliot, a former Salvesen chairman, plan to unveil their own business plan for the group early next week.

Grid faces further £19m hit over pensions

Chris Godsmark

National Grid, the privatised power transmission business, may have to pay back a further £19m to its pension scheme, on top of the £44m repayment ordered recently in a landmark ruling by the pensions ombudsman, it emerged yesterday.

The Grid is also considering scrapping its pension scheme for all but existing members and replacing it with a less generous fund for new employees, should the company lose an appeal against the judgement likely to be brought in the High Court. The moves follow a final ruling this month by the ombudsman, Dr Julian Farrand, which said the Grid must return a surplus taken from the fund after a valuation in 1992. Dr Farrand has argued the rules of the fund, part of the industry-wide Electricity Supply Pension Scheme, specifically outlawed payments to employers. The Grid had allocated 70 per cent of a £62.3m surplus to itself to fund voluntary redundancy payments, while 30 per cent went to pensioners in enhanced benefits.

The additional £19m surplus came from a second actuarial valuation of the pension scheme in 1995. National Grid confirmed that the surplus cash had been identified as the property of the company under its reading of pensions law.

Across the industry the total repayment could reach £1bn. National Power, which removed almost £200m, has already begun its own court proceedings to clarify the Ombudsman's decision. Eastern Group has said it may have to give back £75m.

In another development, Trade unions representing workers across the electricity industry are now publicly supporting National Grid and opposing the legal action brought by two pensioners, David Laws and Reg Mayes, secretary of the Electricity Supply Trade Union Council, said if the Grid lost a court case it would mean less investment and more job cuts. Mr Cooper is also general secretary of the Engineers' and Managers' Association, whose members include the two Grid pensioners.

He said: "We will be faced with the closure of the pension scheme and we fought for many years to get good pensions in this industry. Newcomers will be faced with a lousy scheme."

A Grid spokeswoman said: "It is possible we will close down the scheme and start a new one. It won't be a final salary scheme."

Salvesen rebels mount new attack on board

Magnus Grimond

The row over the future of Christian Salvesen, the Edinburgh-based transport and rental group, intensified yesterday after rebel shareholders rolled out James Grant, the former finance director of Lucas, to lead a new attack on board.

Mr Grant criticised the recent performance of Salvesen under current chief executive Chris Masters, saying the transport logistics side of the group had become "obsessed with cost cutting" and accused the Aggreko generator hire operation of complacency. He claimed that the rate of return at the group had sunk from 25 per cent to under 15 per cent

over the past three years, below the cost of capital in the logistics division at least. Only they had "the vision, the strategy to produce growth," he suggested.

But Salvesen, which yesterday published a circular outlining its plans to pay a one-off £100m foreign income dividend as a precursor to demerging Aggreko, roundly denied the allegations.

Mr Masters said: "Aggreko now a world leader in what it does. It was a major supplier to the Atlanta Olympics. To say it has become complacent is just simply untrue."

He also explained that the return on capital in logistics had fallen recently because Salvesen had invested over £100m in the business over the past three years, which inevitably depressed

Inntrepreneur offers discounts to tenants

Tom Stevenson
City Editor

Inntrepreneur, the pub company jointly owned by Fosters and Grand Metropolitan, moved to build bridges with disgruntled tenants yesterday by offering its publicans a package of beer discounts and other benefits. The deal, which Inntrepreneur is funding from its own coffers until a supply deal with Scottish & Newcastle expires next March, means the company is unlikely to seek a stock market flotation for at least two years and possibly longer.

The main plank of the package is a base discount of £30 a barrel on beer supplied by Scottish Courage's mainstream brands, which include Courage Best Bitter, Director's, John Smith's, Holsten, Budweiser and Foster's lager.

Inntrepreneur said it would

Good times roll again for Eighties property barons

John Willcock

If any further proof were needed that the frothy boom times of the eighties are back, just look at the property developers who everyone thought were long gone, but are now back in business with speculative projects. The UK high street banks may have racked up bad debt provisions of over £5bn in 1992, much of it due to the post 80s property crash, but this is not putting the banks off from supporting another wave of development.

Godfrey Bradman, Martin Landau, Gerald Ronson, Stuart Lipton, Trevor Osborne and Paul Reichmann are all back in business, showing the younger generation of developers how to resolve the issues.

Yesterday's package follows on from the DTI's decision this week to allow Inntrepreneur to extend its tie beyond 1998 providing it offers its publicans an alternative to the beers currently supplied by Scottish Courage.

Take Godfrey Bradman, the former tax specialist who built the Broadgate office complex in the City, but who then lost control of the development in the recession and saw his company, Roschaugh, go bust.

Mr Bradman is now back buying and selling development land, and recently sold a pack-

age of land in Paddington Basin to Elliott Bernard of Chelsfield.

Part of Trevor Osborne's Speyhawk company went bust in the recession, and he is now back as head of Trevor Osborne Property Ltd.

Probably the biggest player of them all, Paul Reichmann, saw his Olympia & York global

property empire crumble in 1992 when Canary Wharf, the Independent's home, went into administration. Mr Reichmann then lead a consortium which bought the development back from the banks, although he is thought to have only around 10 per cent of the equity.

Then there's Martin Landau,

ties, with Lord Gowrie as chairman. This new company is redeveloping MIS's former headquarters at One Curzon Street, Mayfair, which it acquired at the end of 1995 for just over pounds £55m.

Stuart Lipton sold his company Stanhope to British Land and is now back with new ventures. Gerald Ronson has also made a dramatic come back. His company Heron unveiled a £200m residential and commercial development near Chepstow in South Wales last week. The development, if approved, will cover 500 acres and include a new bypass for Chepstow.

Heron nearly collapsed in the post 1980s property crash. It only survived with the support of over 80 banks, which allowed it to write off around £1bn. New investors then injected over £100m of capital leaving Mr Ronson with just 5 per cent of the equity.

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only survived with the support of over 80 banks, which allowed it to write off around £1bn. New investors then injected over £100m of capital leaving Mr Ronson with just 5 per cent of the equity.

Mr Reichmann was only recently appointed an executive vice-president of Walt Disney Co Europe.

Philippe Bourguignon, chairman of Euro Disney who is credited with reviving the fortunes of the troubled Disneyland Paris theme park just outside Paris, yesterday unexpectedly left the company to join Club Med, another troubled leisure group, writes Clifford German.

His departure comes just two weeks after Euro Disney's finance director Xavier de Mezerec also left unexpectedly. "It

is great news for Club Med, and a disaster for Euro Disney," according to Nigel Reed, analyst at Paribas Capital Markets.

STOCK MARKETS									
FTSE 100					Dow Jones*				
17070					9510				
4356.10					4357.40				
4363.50	+13.10	+0.3	4633.50	4015.30	3.37	3632.30	3.61		



JEREMY WARNER

The true conspiracy theorist might suspect an even darker purpose behind Sky's manoeuvring – to ensure that digital terrestrial doesn't actually happen at all, leaving the future to the Murdoch monopoly of digital satellite.

A cosy little carve-up in digital television

Digital Television Network is a catchy enough, bi-tech name for a company but you'd be forgiven for not having noticed it. In fact it is the other bidder for the licence to run digital terrestrial television. "Other" is the operative word here, for its bid got utterly lost in all the excitement a couple of weeks back that surrounded the spectacle of Michael Green of Carlton and Gerry Robinson of Granada jumping into bed with Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB to form the only alternative consortium in the running.

Against this kind of fire power, the DTN bid must already look a lost cause. But that hasn't stopped its backers launching a well resourced PR and lobbying campaign to urge its case. DTN is still adamant it can win. Is this just wishful thinking, or is there a realistic chance?

DTN starts from a position of weakness, financially and in every other respect. What was intended as a consortium of powerful commercial and financial interests is now just a one-man band. Spooked by the arrival of BSkyB, first Canal Plus, then NatWest, then Merrill Lynch and finally United News and Media all dropped out of the running. While there is still some possibility of Lord Holford's United News coming back in, DTN as it stands consists of just NTL, the transmission services company owned by International CableTel.

This in itself is a serious enough company, but it is by no means clear what its motives are here. Is it genuinely interested in developing digital terrestrial, or is its main interest in lucrative supply and upgrade contracts for NTL?

Even taking the charitable view, the unfortunate truth is that DTN's chief card is an entirely negative one – that it is the only alternative to a powerful and monopolistic alliance of Britain's biggest commercial TV companies. It has to be admitted, however, that this is quite an ace – so much so that you begin to wonder why it was that Carlton and Granada invited BSkyB in.

On the face of it, BSkyB brings nothing but downside to the consortium. It already has a monopoly of analogue pay TV and is intent on making its own digital satellite systems the dominant future platform for pay TV. It provides the vast bulk of the programming for Britain's still fragmented and stumbling cable industry. It will have a monopoly of subscription management in both satellite digital and terrestrial digital. And finally it owns the rights to the encryption technology that allows pay TV supply. Now it is proposing to become the dominant partner in the commercial part of digital terrestrial too. Is there no stopping this company?

DTN's best hope may lie in Brussels, which has shown itself to be far from shy about meddling in Britain's TV market. If the European Commission thinks BSkyB's monopoly of pay TV would be strengthened by the company's participation in digital terrestrial, it might take action.

There's no guessing how the Independent Television Commission in Britain will choose to treat these concerns. Its brief is to award the licence to the consortium most likely to achieve the biggest take-up of digital, so that analogue spectrum can be freed up for other things. That provides plenty of scope for the ITC to award the licence to Sky, regardless of the competition issues.

The combined programming attributes of Sky, Granada and Carlton would appear to be streets ahead of its rival. DTN is able to offer some genuine innovations on interactive services, but in terms of content, the consortium still looks an uneven one.

The politics of it all gives a further dimension. The decision could be taken at any time between now and the end of May – in other words it could be either before or after the general election. If the ITC intends to go for DTN, it is unlikely to announce its decision before the election, for to do so would risk the wrath of Mr Murdoch, who might then feel inclined to swing his newspapers behind

the Labour Party. This shouldn't be a concern to the ITC, which is meant to be entirely independent and uncorrupted by the politicians; in practice it is very much a concern. To award the licence to Sky ahead of the election would be equally awkward, for the Conservatives could then be accused of trying to bribe Mr Murdoch into supporting the cause.

All this points to a decision after the election. That makes the stakes for the Sky consortium even higher. Just remember: it was "the Sun won't" last time round. For the time being its politics are still fluid. Mr Murdoch has played a clever game in keeping the politicians guessing which way the tide will swing. The choice is not an easy one. If the Sun sticks the boot into Labour and Labour wins anyway, then the independence of the ITC will not be worth a fig.

One way or another, the new government will find a way of ostracising Sky. In these circumstances, Mr Murdoch's best policy might be to have his titles sit on the fence.

Equally possible is that some kind of understanding has been reached during the now quite regular meetings between Tony Blair and Mr Murdoch. Back us and you can have what you want, Mr Blair might have said. If this sounds just too conspiratorial to be believed, just read Andrew Neil's book. These are murky waters.

Indeed the true conspiracy theorist might suspect an even darker purpose behind Sky's manoeuvring – to ensure that digital terrestrial doesn't actually happen at all, leaving the future to the Murdoch monopoly of digital satellite. If that seems to be taking the argument just a little too far, the truth is probably not far different.

In evidence this week is the National Heritage Select Committee inquiry into the future of broadcasting. DTN accused Sky of only being along for the ride. The Sky bid had at its heart a partner whose chief purpose was developing digital satellite as the dominant delivery platform for pay TV. DTN said: "It offers nothing substantive in the area of interactive services, may weaken competition in the telecoms market and will do little to help advertisers or programme providers."

What DTN is saying here is that these broadcasters are bidding merely for the purpose of monopolising the latest form of delivery and preventing anyone else getting a look in. Undoubtedly it is right about this. What is proposed amounts to a cosy little carve-up.

The tragedy of the situation is that DTN by itself is probably not credible enough to provide a realistic alternative. Lamentably, the company that nobody's ever heard of looks destined to remain that way.

Blair 'may face rail franchise cash crisis'

Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

The Labour Party has been warned by British Rail managers that a train operating company will have to ask for more cash to run services within three years of Tony Blair taking office, according to shadow cabinet aides.

The managers claimed that some of the private operators bid so aggressively for train services that they will not be able to meet the ambitious targets they have set for themselves.

Labour is "committed to refusing any further subsidy payments and if the private firm will not be able to run trains with the money provided by the government, Labour's new rail authority will take over the franchise."

One option under consideration is a hit squad of rail professionals who will step in, should a franchisee pull out, and run the service.

A spokesman for Glenda Jackson, a shadow transport minister, said: "Labour will take a tough policy towards franchisees who fail to meet their obligations. We will not be held to ransom by private companies."

The Government said that it would not shell out more subsidies. "We would take a very dim view of any bidder coming back for any more money than has been agreed," said a spokesman for Ofra, the office of passenger franchising.



On the attack: Chelsea chairman Ken Bates played down worries about costs as he announced reduced losses

Lira up as Italy's tax for Europe gets go-ahead

Katherine Butler
Brussels
Yvette Cooper
London

Italy's bid to become a founding member of the single European currency in 1999 was significantly boosted yesterday after it received the go-ahead from Brussels to use its controversial "tax for Europe", a

one-off levy on personal incomes, to reduce its deficit to meet the Maastricht criteria.

The lira rose to 986.80 against the mark yesterday following the EU decision, and in response to remarks by Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi and Bundesbank council member Ernst Weltevete, which increased traders' expectations that Italy would join EMU in the first wave.

Eurostat, the EU's statistical watchdog, ruled that the new Euro-tax, expected to raise around £12,000m (£4.5bn), can legitimately be employed to slash the national budget deficit this year.

Questions had arisen that one part of the tax, worth around 0.19 per cent of GDP, was in fact a loan rather than a sustainable way to reduce the

deficit, because politicians had promised to repay the tax in future.

Mr Prodi said yesterday: "Europe is within reach." Italy was still £6,000bn to £14,000bn short of meeting the Maastricht criteria, hence the need for a mini-budget later this year, he said.

Aware that Germany is deeply uneasy about Italian en-

try into EMU in the first wave, Mr Prodi said: "Europe is not just about a currency. It is impossible to think of Europe cut off from its great Latin culture ... If we are not in the first group, our currency would come under assault, our economy would be defenceless, our international credibility would be diminished."

Earlier this week, the lira fell

against the mark as traders began to think that Italy could not make the first wave. Yesterday the lira regained some of that ground. But it was also helped by concern that Germany itself might not make the Maastricht criteria.

Mr Weltevete said yesterday: "I share doubts that Germany will meet the fiscal criterion's reference value this year."

Disaster-prone Hickson puts the past behind it

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY MAGNUS GRIMOND

from disposals over the past couple of years, but it is still signalling the need for one or more further sales to meet a commitment to lenders to cut debts by £25m by the year end. Talks are thought to be under way with a number of prospective purchasers, but Hickson is coy about which businesses are on the block.

Success would leave gearing at somewhere below 30 per cent and the group better placed to capitalise on the

strength of its balance sheet.

Comparisons are flattered by the £50.9m exceptional take-up in 1995 to cover disposals and restructuring costs, a figure which has been cut to £17m in the latest results. Stripping that out and the Hickson Manro surfactants business, whose sale led to last year's exceptional charge, underlying operating profits edged up from £9.7m to £10.5m. But even that is not the whole picture, because insurance recoveries after a fire in the group's PharmaChem business in Cork slumped from £7m to £400,000 between the two years. Sir James suggests the real underlying improvement at the operating level is therefore more like £2m, reflecting the recovery programme instituted after a board clearance in 1995. That is on course to deliver cost savings of £5m a year by 1998.

Sir James also had plenty of progress to report on the group's debts, which threatened to overwhelm the group last year when Hickson had to go cap in hand to its bankers. Borrowings have fallen steadily from the £133m peak they hit in November 1995 and ended the year at £56.4m.

The group has raised around £50m

PharmaChem site. That is still running way below former capacity levels after the fire and the major loss of business in the wake of the Persil Power accelerator debacle, but Hickson is making progress in rebuilding the operation and is now boasting work for five of the world's top 10 drugs companies. Trading losses last year are thought to be around half the £25m racked up in 1995 and PharmaChem should be profitable by the year end.

Success would leave gearing at somewhere below 30 per cent and the group better placed to capitalise on the

strength of its balance sheet.

Hickson International: at a glance

Turnover (£m) 343 388 393 384 323
Operating profit (£m) 24.3 26.2 26.0 25.0 22.0
Earnings per share (pence) 10.5 10.0 8.9 25.8 5.8

There is also progress to report in the group's other problem area, the Castleford operations of the Hickson & Welch chemical intermediates business. New management and new contracts with the likes of Du Pont helped profits more than double to £5m.

James Capel has raised its forecast for this year from £10m to £11.5m, despite an expected £1.5m hit for currency, putting the shares down 0.5p at 66.5p, on a forward multiple of 12, dropping to under 9.

The recovery potential is strong, but the sector is out of favour and a US price war in wood preservatives could prove a dampener on Hickson's business. Hold.

Appetite for Nord Anglia

The boom in the stock market is leading to a predictable flood of new issues, but Nord Anglia Education is one that should stand out proud of the torrent. Founded 25 years ago by the executive chairman Kevin McNeany, the group claims to be unique in being the only substantial UK operator of private educational establishments and provider of "outsourced" educational services. Mr McNeany is nailing his colours to the business by selling only £700,000 worth of shares in this month's flotation and agreeing to a two-year lock-in for his remaining 45 per cent stake, worth £2.1m at the 140p a share placing price.

The group is planning to raise £5.75m for itself in the float and £2.5m for existing shareholders, mainly venture capital backers Charterhouse and the Royal Bank of Scotland, both of which are holding

on completely after seven years. Mr McNeany said "the appetite for the shares has been near breath-taking" and he certainly talks a good story.

Pre-tax profits have grown from £91.000 in 1994 to £1.63m last year. The group's brokers, Henry Cooke, Lumsden, are forecasting £2.1m for the current year to August, putting the shares on a forward p/e of 14 at the placing price.

That looks reasonable in the current state of the market, but valuing Nord Anglia is tricky, given the lack of similar businesses against which to compare it. The main profit earner last year was 15 private schools in the UK and three established in Moscow, Warsaw and Prague over the last few years. But although the schools division slipped in £1.15m last year, the backwash of the recession is slowing growth in traditional activities and the main excitement lies elsewhere.

The provision of outsourced local and national government services, from inspectors for Ofsted, the schools' watchdog, to lecturers for colleges of further education has grown from nowhere to profits of £181,000 last year. Given growth rates in excess of 15 per cent, this business could be providing half the group's bottom line in two years. The presence of the former government minister Sir David Trippier on the board should help on that count.

Mr McNeany talks of eventually taking over the running of local authority schools, but in the meantime is building a chain of all-day nursery schools. Operating in a highly fragmented market and with returns on capital of 20 per cent that could prove most fruitful.

Worth picking up for any investors who can get hold of the shares.

John Hayes, the former chairman and founder of Switland Motors, was jailed for five years for fraudulent trading. Judge Richard May at Oxford Crown Court also disqualified Hayes from acting as a company director for 10 years. He sentenced David Sharrett, the car dealership's former finance director, to a three-and-a-half year jail term and disqualified him as a company director for seven years. The jury failed to reach a verdict on the same charge brought against Richard Hayes, the operations director and brother of the chairman, and the judge ordered that the charge remain on file. The case was brought before Switland's aborted stock market flotation in November 1993. Receivers established that, contrary to accounting documents, the car dealership was grossly insolvent to the tune of £25m.

Pearson has sold its 10 per cent stake in Hong Kong's Television Broadcasts for £11.2m, two years after it paid £106.2m for the state. It has received dividends worth £3.5m during its ownership. Marjorie Scardino, chief executive, said: "Our commitment to the growth of our businesses in Asia/Pacific is as strong as ever, but we have decided that this investment is no longer effective in developing either our television business or our interests in the region." However, Pearson said it would continue in its Indian joint venture with TVB, the *Hindustan Times*, Carlton and Schroders.

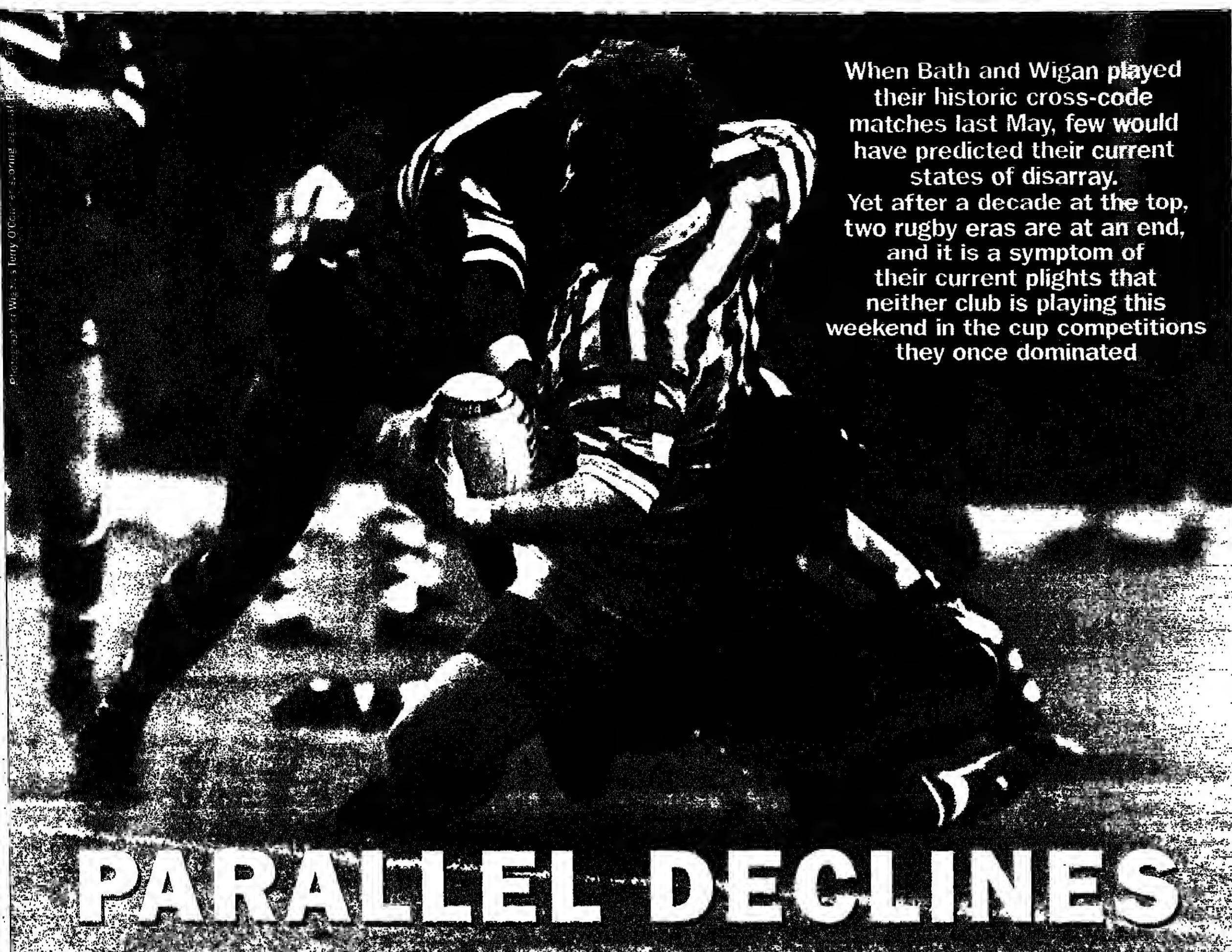
Official figures confirmed that the British economy grew by 0.8 per cent in the fourth quarter of 1996. The annual rate of GDP growth was revised upwards by 0.1 percentage points to 2.7 per cent for 1996 as a whole. Consumer spending once again proved the driving force behind growth, rising by 0.9 per cent in the last three months of 1996. However, investment remained weak, growing by only 0.2 percentage points after a large fall in the third quarter. Domestic demand as a whole grew by 0.6 per cent, easing the pressures on the Chancellor to raise interest rates.

France intends to knock state bank Crédit Lyonnais into shape to privatise it in two years, a finance ministry spokeswoman said. She added that the ministry would hold off on submitting a rescue plan for the bank to the European Commission for approval until the end of March as it looked for ways to limit the drain on public funds. The rescue plan, the third in four years, had been expected to be lodged in Brussels this week.

Inspirations, the holiday company, said winter passenger volumes had increased by 12 per cent, while the retail division was substantially ahead compared to the same time last year. Jim Harris, chairman, said at the annual general meeting that average prices obtained were significantly higher than last year. Inspirations has reduced capacity for the coming summer by around 20 per cent. The percentage of the programme sold is considerably higher than at the corresponding time last year, the chairman said.

surge

unit trusts



PARALLEL DECLINES



Chris Hewett on Bath



Dave Hadfield on Wigan

It took Edward Gibbon six volumes to explain the decline and fall of Rome, and very nearly as much word power has been lavished on the demise of Bath as the most successful club side in world rugby contemplates life among the *hoi polloi*. The West Countrymen may yet end the season as English champions but whatever happens between now and the middle of May, a sense of loss will hang heavy over the Recreation Ground during a long summer of breast-beating and recrimination.

Bath's vocabulary of triumph, built up over a decade on the back of a fanatical pursuit of excellence, has never recognised any "U" word apart from loyalty, longing, leadership and might. Yet as they stumble towards the anti-climax of their first professional campaign, they are firm fixtures in the debit column, having relinquished their Pilkington Cup crown, squandered the services of a brilliant coach in Brian Ashton and, in almost apologetic fashion, sacrificed their director of rugby, John Hall.

Worse than that, they have lost the essential impulse, the life force, that made them great. It was called fear: fear of failure on the public stage, fear of the shame culture that held sway in the most caustic of dressing-rooms, fear of failing to cope with the peer pressure established by clever, waspish psychologists like Jack Rowell and Stuart Barnes.

Professionalism carries terrors of its own, but they are very different from the phobias let loose on The Rec during the dying days of amateurism. Rugby's currency used to be calculated in degrees of respect, as it was when Rowell's titans were dominating the market, but one indisputable by-product of the dash for cash is that players are now more concerned with protecting their salaries than their self-esteem. Why wear the hair shirt in Bath when big money and smart suits are on offer elsewhere?

"I can unhesitatingly say that my motivation was based on fear," says Gareth Chilcott, the front-row icon who went from rogue to elder statesman in the space of 15 years at Bath and is now a vice-president of the club. Irrespective of the fact that he was born in Bristol and now devotes at least part of his working week to his role as Gloucester's marketing manager, the mighty Cooch treasures the umbilical cord that links him to The Rec. He still cares, passionately.

"What you have to understand about Bath was that we were unique, both in terms of the players we had in the dressing-room and in the way those players effectively ran the club. We were unashamedly competitive and our pride dictated that no prisoners could be taken, either internally or amongst the opposition.

"We were a hard old lot, to be honest with you, and when I look at the current side, I sometimes wonder who, if anyone,

has the same will-power, the same ability to dig deep for his colleagues.

"When I think of the say we used to have on committee, I still feel amazed; in fact, I can't recall a single occasion when the players didn't get what they wanted. For instance, we were the first English side to regularly stay in a hotel on the Friday night before a big game.

Historically, teams travelled on the Saturday morning - hundreds of miles, sometimes - and more often than not they would leave their form on the coach. We got fed up with that, so we demanded overnight stays and got them. The same goes for our mid-winter training camps in Lanzarote. I think we had that sorted out well before the England test team cottoned on," Chilcott added.

Bath RUFC The glory years

Courage League

Champions: 1988-89, 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94, 1995-96

John Player Cup/Pilkington Cup

Champions: 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996

Middlesex Sevens

Champions: 1994.

CURRENT PLIGHT

Courage League

In third place

Holmekar European Cup

Lost 22-19 to Cardiff in quarter-finals

Pilkington Cup

Lost 39-28 to Leicester in sixth round

"Player power was a big thing at Bath, an essential element in the success story. Of course, we have a change of culture now. The players are employees and they do as they're told. There is no player power now."

And there lies the crux. Bath are no longer state-of-the-art, but the same as everyone else. By allowing any club with a sugar daddy and a modicum of ambition to recreate themselves through the force of the cheque book, professionalism has standardised rugby at the top end. The differences between sides are no longer measured by abstractions - mental approach, focus, desire, physical fitness - but by commercial clout. Either you are rich enough to compete or you are history.

Bankrolled by their local multi-millionaire Andrew Brownsword, Bath are rich enough. But that is all they are.

Other teams - Harlequins, Wasps, Newcastle, Saracens and, via a slightly different route, Leicester - are equally competitive and as Chilcott says, the West Countrymen must now search for new means of attaining the supremacy their own generation came to regard as a birthright.

The professional game was foisted on the clubs, who had no time to prepare themselves for a complete change in the way they operated. In a way, the playing field became level again and the 10 per cent that Bath always had on their rivals was wiped away.

Look at Quins. When we played them in my day, we always felt that their forwards were breakable, that they would disappear when we applied real pressure. Professionalism allowed them to go out and buy a pack, so they bought one.

"Some sides have bought well, others not so well. Bath felt last summer that they had a squad of players who could win them the Heineken Cup as well as the domestic double. By Christmas they realised they had bought in the wrong positions and had to go in search of some forwards. That was the nail in John Hall's coffin."

It should not be forgotten that but for Hall, a local product whose emergence as a world-class loose forward coincided with Bath's initial ascent of rugby's Olympus, the wheel might easily have parted from the wagon as long ago as last summer. Strangely enough, that was about the time the side were lording it with Wigan at Twickenham. Brownsword had not come up with the readies at that stage and without Hall's pleadings and persuasions, many of the squad would have taken the money on offer elsewhere.

Ironically, Brownsword's millions both saved the club and hoisted it below the waterline. The original management structure put in place to oversee the move to full professionalism blew Bath's determinedly individual and hugely effective *modus operandi* to the four winds, leaving Ashton, for one, deeply disillusioned. The restructuring prompted by his departure put the squeeze on Hall, whose role became superfluous as soon as Tony Swift, his close friend, was appointed chief executive.

In the good old days, the only management structure that meant anything to Bath was the bar rota and the make-up of the selection panel. The players and coaches governed themselves from within, their decisions rubber-stamped by a committee content to live under a benign dressing-room dictatorship.

Perhaps, in hindsight, it was too much to expect a club who had ruled one roost to completely dominate another, dramatically different as it was, with the same degree of iron-fisted success. The new hierarchy of Swift, Andy Robinson, Clive Woodward and Phil de Glanville cannot afford to use Rowell, Barnes and Chilcott as their blueprint. Their day has gone. It is time to move on.

When Wigan played Bath at league and union last May, it was justifiably billed as the collision of the dominant forces in the two codes of rugby. Wigan had been on top of their sport for even longer than their union counterparts: unshakable favourites for every competition they entered.

Nine months on, the mood at Central Park is very different. The dynasty might not have crumbled, but there are cracks in it that could hardly have been imagined last spring. Yet it can be argued that getting involved in the distraction of cross-code adventures - they also entered and won the Middlesex Sevens last May - was one of the first signs that all was not well. Wigan had been knocked out of the Challenge Cup for the first time in nine years.

It had long been a suspicion that the club depended more heavily on the annual income from Wembley than was healthy. The eagerness with which they grasped an alternative money-making opportunity confirmed it.

There was a propaganda value for rugby league in those excursions, especially when Wigan won by a landslide while visibly easing up at Maine Road and then swept through the Sevens. But neither their coach, Graeme West, nor their football manager, Joe Lydon, agreed with taking on extra commitments.

Both of them actually played in the game against Bath under union rules, not merely because they fancied trotting out at Twickenham but to try to protect current players from injury.

In retrospect, both men - while restricted by the terms of their respective severance agreements with the club from being openly critical - feel that their expedition across the great divide last May might have cost them the first Super League Championship.

In June they failed to cope with the spoiling tactics employed by the London Broncos at Central Park and were held to a 10-10 draw that ultimately cost them the title.

Hopes rose again when they beat St Helens, but that victory was followed immediately by the departure of Scott Quinnell to Richmond.

This was another sign of radically changed times. A lot of work - his and that of the coaching staff - had gone into making Quinnell an effective rugby league forward. Now he was gone, with Wigan making no attempt to keep him, and West was deprived of one of his few alternatives in the front row.

The head-hunting of Quinnell symbolised a growing problem. League relished the recognition by a wider audience of the skills and athleticism of its players, but when the union clubs started waving their cheque books, it proved a double-edged sword for Wigan. Henry Paul, Jason Robinson, Gary Connolly and Vaiiga Tuigamala were all

recruited for winter spells in rugby union, and Martin Offiah returned to the Home Counties in a joint deal that would see his services shared by Bedford and the Broncos.

The League could have intervened in that and other deals because Offiah, Paul and Tuigamala had all signed Super League loyalty contracts that allows News Limited to say where they can and cannot play. But Wigan were desperate for that clause not to be invoked. There was a simple reason for that: they saw in these loans, as well as in the permanent departures, a way to lighten a crippling wage bill.

Wigan's salary commitments to their players had probably been beyond their means since they first began to assemble a world-beating team in the mid-Eighties. returned for the Cup tie against St Helens two weeks ago, they were either injured, stale or out of condition. Inevitably, Wigan went out of the Cup for the second year running.

The club had already lost one of its key off-field personnel. Lydon had left in December after 11 years at the club, by mutual agreement in the sense that Wigan did not offer him a new contract and Lydon, frustrated by not being allowed to manage, saw little point in being designated as the club's foot-bell manager.

That is one key role that remains vacant, and Wigan have also never appointed a chief executive - an omission for which they could have a proportion of their Murdoch pay-out withheld.

Those empty chairs are indicative of the areas in which Wigan are falling down on the job. For a club which has become the epitome of professionalism on the field, they are surprisingly amateurish off it. Clubs which made a success of the first season of Super League - such as St Helens and the Bradford Bulls - have invested heavily in their administration. Wigan are still run by a board of directors comprising, among others, hakers and furniture traders.

The controlling figure is Robinson, who is a fan by inclination and an antique dealer by occupation, and is widely seen as running the club as a hobby. Robinson, who faces criminal charges next month over a foul with a local newspaper, is a genuine enthusiast, but that will not save him from the scorn of the paying public if he is seen to be presiding over the disintegration of a great side.

Tuigamala has now gone, which sticks in the collective throat despite Wigan's desperate attempts to make it seem that it was all down to his determination to go. There are still players, the likes of Robinson, Connolly and Andy Farrell, who are the best in the British game in their positions, but there are others in the first-team squad who would never have been signed a few seasons ago.

West, as coach, has been made the scapegoat for defeats in the matches that mattered. Sales of season tickets are moving slowly. Further financial problems are building up which will not necessarily be solved by the proposed sale and lease-back of Central Park. There is no doubt that most Wigan fans are unhappy. Many have known nothing but success and they will swiftly withdraw their patronage if they are asked to pay to watch bad rugby or - even worse - losing rugby.

At Central Park, itself depressingly scruffy on three of its four sides, they complain about the impatience of the fans, but that to miss the point. They have never had to learn patience, and the bitterness of their disappointed expectations is the extra curse that comes when the mighty have fallen.

مكالمات من الأصل

Newcastle ready to repay outlay

Chris Hewett
on likely upsets in
rugby union's
Pilkington Cup

The critics who have spent all season waiting for Sir John Hall's bank account to fall victim to spontaneous combustion will be on tenterhooks today when Newcastle, almost as awash with full internationals as they are with money, take on Leicester in what promises to be a compelling Pilkington Cup quarter-final tie at King's Park.

A comfortable victory for the visitors would reinforce a view popularly held in traditionalist circles that Sir John has bought nothing more than an expensive white elephant, but those with an anti-Hall axe to grind may have to wait for vindication. Newcastle are hardly confident of victory

but they are more than hopeful of justifying at least some of their owner's largesse.

Newcastle can boast two thirds of the 18 capped players on view – a remarkable state of affairs given that a full Courage League division still lies between the two clubs. Paul Lam, the shudderingly hard Western Samoa captain, makes his cup debut at loose forward and the Geordies are further encouraged

Smith leaves with harsh words for Hill

Ian Smith, the Scottish international flanker, yesterday criticised Richard Hill, the coaching director of Gloucester, as he completed his move to Moseley, the National League Two club.

Smith, 31, ending a 14-year association with the club, complained he had been forced into the move after being largely ignored by Hill this season. "This move is down to the way Hill has treated me," Smith said. "It was inevitable that I would go given the treatment I've received at the club this year."

Despite his international status – he has been included in the preliminary Lions squad – Smith has played only nine first team games for Gloucester this season.

Smith was also wanted by Bristol and Harlequins, but decided Moseley fitted in best with his work and family commitments. "Before deciding to go there I checked with management figures in the Scottish Rugby Union to get their opinions and I took their advice."

Orrell were also in a critical mood. The Courage League One club were angry over Newcastle's failure to fulfil a second

team fixture today because they could not raise a side. "They can spend £1m on Valencia Ingemal but they can't raise a second team," Geoff Lightfoot, an Orrell spokesman said.

Meanwhile, Orrell are considering seeking a court order to prevent Franco Botica, the former All Black, playing for Llanelli earlier this season but Llanelli earlier this season but the Lancashire club claim the Welsh side have reneged on instalment payments.

Stuart Gaffacher, the Llanelli chairman, confirmed a writ demanding payment of more than £30,000 had been issued against the club earlier this month. He said: "We are taking legal advice and hope that an agreement can soon be reached."

Jocel Viteyakio, the Fiji captain, has been told he must leave Dunvant to honour a contract in New Zealand. Viteyakio made his debut two weeks ago against Swansbury but All Black Promotions Ltd, an off-shoot of the New Zealand Rugby Union, have insisted that the player is contracted to them.

Dunvant claim the huge prop had received a verbal clearance and have called on the Welsh club to fulfil a second

team fixture today because they could not raise a side. "They can spend £1m on Valencia Ingemal but they can't raise a second team," Geoff Lightfoot, an Orrell spokesman said.

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In today's other tie, Gloucester restore Phil Greening to their front row for the game at Wakefield, the rank outsiders. Tomorrow, Harlequins and Saracens complete the weekend's cup business with a London derby at The Stoop.

The particular track in ques-



Alexei Prokhorov, of Russia, drives himself on towards victory in the first ever staging of the 30km cross-country freestyle race at the Nordic Ski World Championships in Trondheim yesterday

Photograph: AFP

Paul wants to play fast game

Rugby League

DAVE HADFIELD

Robbie Paul returns this afternoon to the ground where he spent much of his winter, and hopes to find it as he left.

The Bradford Bulls captain, who played for Harlequins during the close season, is back at The Stoop for the Silk Cut Challenge Cup fifth-round tie against London Broncos, who now share the ground. Paul, a dazzling top-of-the-ground runner who won the Lance Todd Trophy last April by scoring the first hat-trick in a Wembley final, hopes reports of The Stoop's deterioration since he left have been exaggerated.

If it is a mud heap, London can be expected to try to turn the tie of the round into a forward battle, although the Bulls coach Matthew Elliott will not willingly co-operate. "When you've got backs like ours, you don't want them standing around with their hands on their hips."

Those backs include the most significant signing of Bradford's winter, the experienced Australian Danny Peacock, who will play in the centres. He was man of the match with two tries at Hunslet in the last round. The Bulls also include two players signed too late for last year's final, Stuart Spruce and Steve McNamara, though Spruce is doubtful after a chest infection.

Another Australian, Graeme Bradley, believes Bradford are far better placed than at this

stage last year, when they were still in a state of transition. That is ominous for London, who this week had the publicity boost of Richard Branson taking a 15 per cent shareholding in the club.

Of more immediate importance today will be how well their new Australian recruits fill the void left by some significant departures. The former Wests and Illawarra scrum-half Josh White has a tougher act to follow than most two contrasting opponents of that role last year in Kevin Langer and Leo Dynevor. He could not face a more elusive opponent than Paul, who, he points out, was never on the losing side when he started a match for the Quins at The Stoop.

For all the pack mentality that they are expected to adopt, London have strength in their back-line. If they can leave out Greg Barwick in favour of a centre partnership of Paul Smith, just arrived from Sydney City, and David Krause, it says much for the options available to them.

The pick of tomorrow's games are at Salford, where Paris are the unpredictable visitors, and at Warrington, where Jason Harris will make his first-team return against Sheffield Eagles. Harris, embroiled in a long dispute with the club, came through a reserve team outing on Thursday, scoring a try and setting one up with what John Doherty called "a typical piece of magic". He is likely to start on the bench, with Martin Dermott making his Warrington debut at hooker.

Blundell back on track after a pair of close calls

Motor racing

DERICK ALLSOP

Britain's Mark Blundell heads for the US and another season of IndyCars next week, carrying the sort of baggage racing drivers are not supposed to declare.

"I must admit I don't know how I'll react when I get back on that particular track," he said from the sanctuary of a French restaurant by the Thames in London yesterday. "That is going to be hard, very hard."

He did, however, sustain more mental scars to add to those from a big accident in Rio last March. Trepidation is one thing, gnawing fear quite another.

"It is a worry when you have two big ones in less than a year, even though you know neither was your own fault, and you start

to wonder how many more you can get away with," he said. "The team thought I would have died in that crash at Homestead. I thought I was going to die in Rio."

Blundell squeezed out of the competitive equation in Formula One at the end of 1995, had a couple of fifth places to show for his endeavours and anxiety last season. He is driven to this year by the continuing lack of better opportunities in grand prix racing, the prospect of improved results with the PacWest team.

He said: "Formula One is tame compared with Indy racing. In the purest sense, yes, Formula One is up there, the ultimate, but, to actually race, IndyCars is fantastic. It's real racing, with overtaking and up to 15 guys who can win."

"I was offered a grand prix drive with Lola, but why should I be spending my time at the back of the grid when I can look to be at the front of the grid and even win a race in IndyCars?"

"I can't help feel Formula One is pushing the self-destruct

button. The concept is glamorous, but it's all the peripheral stuff that really attracts the people, not the racing."

For all that, Blundell would return Formula One given the chance of driving that elusive competitive car. He said: "I still believe I could do it given the equipment I'm only 30, and even in the cars I've had I've scored points in about half my races. Maybe that opportunity will come, who knows? But for now I'm focused on what I have to do this year and it's up to me to make the best of it."

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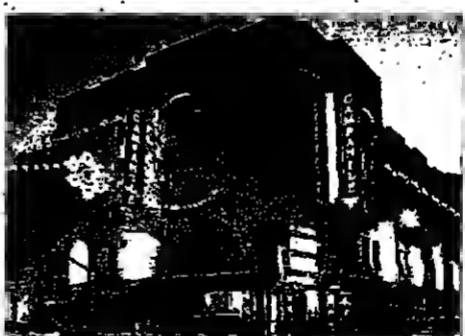
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most warm
his record
chievement

Mistinguett can hit right note

Racing

GREG WOOD

One of the great attractions of racing is that it takes place 12 months a year, so there is always something to look forward to, and today's stars at Kempton and Haydock offer a reminder that even on that awful Friday morning in March when you realise that there are 362 days to go to the next Cheltenham Festival, the compensation is that the Grand National meeting at Aintree is much closer to hand.

Since it is barely a fortnight until the festivities begin in the Cotswolds, today's meetings are the last stopping-off point for prospective champions. For those whose ambitions lie in Liverpool, however, this is the ideal moment to bring a runner that much closer to peak fitness, and since horses which go to Aintree as an afterthought to Cheltenham tend to disappoint, today's action is worth committing to long-term memory.

Six runners quoted at 25-1 or less for the Grand National by

William Hill will be on the track today, including both of the firm's 12-1 joint second-favourites, Encore Un Peu and Lo Stregone, though sadly for ante-post punters, they are not in opposition. Encore Un Peu, the runner-up to Rough Quest at Aintree last season, makes his seasonal debut in the Racing Post Chase at Kempton, while Lo Stregone, a last-minute absentee when strongly fancied for last year's National, attempts to repeat last year's victory in the Greensills Grand National Trial at Haydock.

It is the latter contest with £80,000 in added prize-money, which must be viewed as the event of the day, and since Lo Stregone is running off the same handicap mark as he did when beating Tartan Tyrant by five lengths 12 months ago, it is little surprise to find him favourite this morning at 2-1. The ground too is almost as soft as it was last year, but one difference which may find Lo Stregone out is the overall quality of his opponents.

Though last year's field was it was hardly vintage, today,

though there is a mixture of potential and proven high-class performers, such as Couldnt Be Better, Belmont King and Suny Bay, in opposition, and one of them should be able to exploit the favourite's famous lack of a turn of foot.

After his brave win under top weight in a very competitive Thistles Chase in Ireland last time, Couldnt Be Better must be respected, but it is Belmont King (2-5) who appeals as the value. Paul Nicholls's chaser was outclassed behind Danoli and Jodami at Leopardstown three weeks ago, but his earlier win in the Rehearsal Chase at Cheltenham indicated that today's trip and going should bring out the best in him.

The previous race at Haydock sees the latest offering for Blyuss, who has done little wrong in three runs over hurdles, but is far from the serious Champion Hurdle contender which ante-post odds imply. Backers should exploit the hype which surrounds him and take the chance to back MISTINGUETT (nap 2-15). Though only fourth to

Make A Stand in the Tote Gold Trophy, Nigel Twiston-Davies's mare was unable to dominate there, and should benefit from a return to front-running today.

Only a cynic would suggest that David Nicholson's decision to run three horses in the Racing Post Chase owes anything to his employment as a columnist with the sponsors, but his jottings will certainly merit attention today since his trio occupy three of the first four slots in the betting. Call It A Day, the chosen mount of Adriatic Maguire, is the obvious pick, but it is another of Nicholls's runners, See More Business (4-10) that they

Official may now face inquiry

GREG WOOD

The final mutterings emerged yesterday in the case of the Haydock jockeys' strike, or rather, the strike that officially never took place.

A Jockey Club inquiry decided late on Thursday night that the 21 riders who apparently refused to leave the weighing room at Haydock on 16 October were in fact simply unaware that they had been requested to do so.

One of their number, Dean McKeown, re-emphasised the point yesterday, while also standing up for the racecourse officials involved in the confusion, who may now face censure by the same Disciplinary Committee which decided that the jockeys were not to blame for the incident.

The jockeys felt sorry for Paul Barton [the steward's] secretary and a former jockey himself," McKeown said. "He was running around trying to get the opinions of 21 jockeys in the weighing room, owners and trainers and trying to deal with everybody else wanting to know what was going on. Everything happened so quickly that there was total confusion. We accept that nobody was guilty of anything. Paul Barton was put under unfair pressure.

"We didn't strike. That may be what people like Mick Eastoby think but it was a breakdown in communications and it was taken out of our hands."

"All we want to see in future is a procedure that ensures everyone is able to express their view so that nothing like this ever happens again."

Haydock's Clerk of the course, meanwhile, expressed his annoyance that the Jockey Club's finding that the course was fit for racing had been overlooked. "I think that was a fundamental issue and it's pathetic that it didn't seem to be taken into account," Philip Arkwright said. "Apart from that I have no comment. What happened to the jockeys is nothing to do with me."

who made an eye-catching debut when second to Shadow Leader, a winner again, at Folkestone.

4-16: KING LUCIFER put up a solid performance when third to General Command in the competitive Great Yarmouth Handicap Chase. He may have to fear from the useful novice See More Business.

4-17: OCEAN HAWK faces a tough task at weights, but is suited by the track and his rivals are out of form or out of the handicap.

4-18: SUNY BAY, who broke a blood vessel at Kempton in November, remains an exciting prospect and might be worth chance.

Lo Stregone, last year's winner, will be a formidable opponent.

4-19: KING OF SPAIN, who is closing in on his 10th success of the season and Land Afar all suited by fast ground, AROUND THE GALE looks the best option to beat Gelsada. The

stewards' report is awaited.

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